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ABSTRACT

This document contains 13 papers presented at a national forum on special education teacher satisfaction, retention, and attrition. The forum focused on results and implications of three studies: (1) the San Diego State University/American Institute for Research (California) study of variables related to the satisfaction, attrition, and retention of special education teachers; (2) the Research Triangle Institute (Tennessee) study on improving the retention of special education teachers; and (3) the Eugene Research Institute (Oregon) study on attrition/retention of urban special education teachers. A paper titled "Overview of the Three Research Projects" (by Patricia Thomas Cegelka) introduces the collection and is followed by "The National Picture: Messages from SASS (Schools and Staffing Survey) Data" (Erling E. Boe et al.). Other papers include: "The Attrition Picture: Lessons from Three Research Projects" (John Pyecha and Roger Levine); "Working Conditions: Job Design" (Russell Gersten et al.); "Working Conditions: Administrator Support" (Bonnie Billingsley et al.); "Impact of Job Design Problems and Lack of Support" (Russell Gersten et al.); "Personnel Preparation: Relationship to Job Satisfaction" (Patricia Cegelka and Donald Doorlag); "Strategic Planning for Special Education Teacher Retention" (Peggie Campeau and John Pyecha); "Attrition/Retention of Urban Special Education Teachers: Multi-Faceted Research and Strategic Action Planning" (Martha Morvant and Russell Gersten); "Teachers' Perceptions of Working Conditions: Problems Relating to Central Office Support [and] Section 2: Administrative Support" (Russell Gersten et al.); "Attrition of Special Educators: Why They Leave and Where They Go" (Mary T. Brownell et al.); "Retention and Attrition in Special Education: Analysis of Variables That Predict Staying, Transferring, or Leaving" (David Miller et al.); and "Retention, Transfer, and Attrition of Special and General Education Teachers in National Perspective" (Erling E. Boe et al.) (DB)

ED 389 147

National Dissemination Forum on Issues Relating to Special Education Teacher Satisfaction, Retention and Attrition

May 25 - 26, 1995
Academy for Educational Development Building
Washington, D.C.

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WORKING PAPER # 1

Overview of the Three Research Projects

Prepared by

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for the

NATIONAL DISSEMINATION FORUM
Special Education Teacher Satisfaction, Retention, and Attrition

May 25-26, 1995

San Diego State University and American Institute for Research

The SDSU/AIR Study of Variables Related to the Satisfaction, Attrition, and Retention of Special Education Teachers.

Districts in Study: San Diego Unified School District, San Diego, California and San Jose Unified School District, San Jose, California

Demographics of Districts:

San Diego Unified School District	
Population of San Diego:	1.3 million (2.5 mil in urban area)
Student Enrollment:	126,000
SPED Enrollment:	12,000
San Jose Unified School District	
Population of San Jose:	3/4 million (1.5 mil in urban area)
Student Enrollment:	26,000
Special Edu. Enrollment:	3,400

Sample: Current special education teachers (1992-93) and former special education teachers (those who had left a special education position in one of the two districts in 1990-1993)

Project Components

- **Critical Incident Study.** Interviews with a national sample of current and former special education teachers were conducted to help identify the range of variables to be probed.
- **Analysis of California Basic Education Data Systems (CBEDS).** A state data base on the employment of over 200,000 teachers for the years 1987-88 to 1989-90 yielded information on teacher mobility patterns in special education and general education across various types of school districts (large urban, small urban, suburban, and other).
- **Study of Current Special Education Teachers (1992-1993).**

  Survey Questionnaire. A written questionnaire was used to gather data on teachers' assignments, training, and personal data. This 3-4 page written survey instrument was designed to take no more than 15 minutes to complete.

  Telephone Interviews. Two overlapping versions of a telephone interview were used, one for current teachers and one for leavers. Questions were mostly forced choice, although a number of open-ended questions were also included. The interview questionnaire for current teachers included approximately 160 items and took an average of 47 minutes to complete.

Sample Size and Participation Rates

San Diego: 50% of the 719 potentially eligible special education teachers were selected.

San Jose: 75% of 172 potentially eligible special education teachers were selected.

Santa Clara County: 50% of 24 potentially eligible SH teachers

Of the 485 originally eligible current teachers, 451 participated. (Participation Rate of 93%)

- **Study of Special Education Teachers who left Special Education Teaching in Districts in 1990-91 to 1992-93.**

Telephone Interview. For the Leavers' study, the interview protocol was modified. Fewer open-ended questions were included. Interviews still averaged 56 minutes.

Sample Size and Participation Rates.
Of the total of 277 eligible leavers, 224 completed interviews. (Participation Rate of 80.9%)

- **Strategic Planning.**
  A two-tiered process involving both a Statewide Stakeholder group and a district-specific Stakeholders' group.
  - Statewide Stakeholders' group began meeting in Year I.
  - Utilized the electronic boardroom.
  - Provided input to major research activities.
  - Developed strategic plans based on data collected.

Research Triangle Institute

Improving the Retention of Special Education Teachers

District in Study: Memphis City Schools (MCS), Memphis, Tennessee

Demographics of District:

Population of Memphis:	640,000
Student Enrollment:	107,819
Teachers	5,225
Special Education Teachers	627

Sample: Current (1991-92) special education teachers and former (1990-91 to 1992-93) general and special education teachers

Project Components

- **Screening Study.** Conducted in 1992, this study provided an overview of the job satisfaction, commitment, and career plans of the current special education workforce and created a data base for identifying a sample of teachers to be interviewed for the Influencing Factors Study. The screening study was a 4 page mail questionnaire of all Memphis City School special education teachers employed in the 1991-92 school year.

  Sample Size: N=613
  Respondents: N=470
  (Response Rate of 77%)

- **Influencing Factors Study**. Conducted in 1992, the purpose of this study was to to assist in (1) understanding the influences of career plans, commitment, and job satisfaction in a sample of currently employed special educators; and (2) developing questionnaire items for the other instruments to be used in the project. This study consisted of face-to-face interviews with a purposive sample (N=81) of the special education teachers who participated in the Screening Study.

- **Exiter Study.** This study investigated why special educators left their special education positions in the MCS district. Information was gathered from all special education teachers who had left their classroom positions in 1990-91, 1991-92, and 1992-93; and, for comparison purposes, from a stratified random sample of general education teachers who exited their positions within the same time period.

  Sample Size of Special Educators N=145
  Respondents N=104
  (Response Rate of 72%)

Sample Size of General Educators	N=187
Respondents	N=120
(Response Rate of 64%)	

- **Comprehensive Commitment and Retention Study**. Conducted in 1993, this study included all current special education teachers and a comparison sample of general education teachers who were employed in the MCS in the 1992-93 school year. Two 20-page mail questionnaires (approximately 130 items) were used, one for special education teachers and one for the comparison sample of special education teachers. The surveys gathered information on teachers' educational backgrounds, training, licensure/certification, career entry patterns, perceptions of the work environment in the MCS, job/career satisfaction, and future career plans.

Sample Size of General Educators:	N=398
Respondents:	N=289
(Response Rate of 72.6%)	

Sample Size of Special Educators:	N=638
Respondents:	N=458
(Response Rate of 72.6%)	

- **Strategic Planning.**
  Research Triangle Institute (RTI) and Memphis City Schools (MCS)

  The Stakeholder group served as an ongoing advisory/planning panel:
  - Developed a district-level vision statement and mission statement for the strategic planing process.
  - Focused on personnel, specifically on improving working conditions and personnel policies.
  - Drafted a "plan to plan."
  - Conducted "environmental scanning," assessed factors critical to achieving the state mission and vision for strategic planning.
  - Identified 4 strategic issue areas, 4 goals, 16 objectives, 32 strategies, and 73 action steps.

Eugene Research Institute

Attrition/Retention of Urban Special Education Teachers: Multi-faceted Research and Strategic Action Planning

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Districts in Study: Three large urban school districts located in the western United States.

Demographics of Districts:

	District 1	District 2	District 3
City Population	405,000	515,000	439,000
Student Enrollment	57,000	64,047	56,282
Special Edu. Students	2,116	5,600	7,316
Special Edu. Teachers	425	360	438

Sample: Current (1991-92) and former (1991-92, 1992-93) special education teachers

Project Components

- **Comprehensive Written Questionnaire**. The questionnaire, *Working in Special Education: The Experiences of Urban Special Educators,* was sent to 1,060 special education faculty (887 special education teachers and 173 speech pathologists) in three large urban school districts. This survey, designed to take approximately 35-40 minutes to complete, focused on conditions of work and job satisfaction.

Response Rate of Special Education Teachers

Sample Size		No. of Respondents	Response Rate
District 1	360	298	83%
District 2	287	225	78%
District 3	240	198	83%
Total:	**887**	**721**	**81%**

- **Calculation of Annual Attrition Rates.** District staffing lists were used to prepare preliminary lists of individuals thought to be leavers. These lists were then verified through discussions with district staff and through phone or mail contacts with the leavers.

- **Follow-up Contacts with Leavers**. Teachers identified as leavers during or following the 1991-92 and 1992-93 school years were contacted by phone or mail to verfiy that they had, in fact, left special education teaching and to document their post-attrition employment status.

- **The Interview Study of Leavers.** In-depth interviews were conducted with a sample (N=17) of teachers who left during or following the 1991-92 school year. These interviews focused broadly on the careers of these teachers, with an emphasis on the range of factors that influenced their decisions to leave. Interviews were conducted in person and took approximately 2-3 hours each. Also conducted were telephone interviews (approximately one hour in length) with 16 teachers who had left during or following the 1992-93 school year. Interviews with these leavers focused more directly on the leaving decision.

- **Strategic Planning.**
  Eugene Research Institute (ERI) and Silver City Unified School District (SCU) in Arizona

  The advisory panel and task force:
  - Reviewed and discussed ERI's findings
  - Considered alternate perspectives and issues
  - Identified 20 issues relating to improving recruitment and retention of special education teachers in the district, categorized into 5 problem areas.
  - Targeted two problem areas, **Working Environment** and **Balancing the Workload** for recommended actions
  - Continues to operate on its own as several work groups made up of general and special education teachers and administrators.

WORKING PAPER # 2

The National Picture: Messages from SASS Data

Prepared by

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NATIONAL DISSEMINATION FORUM
Special Education Teacher Satisfaction, Retention, and Attrition

May 25-26, 1995

RETENTION, TRANSFER, AND ATTRITION OF SPECIAL AND GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE[1]

Draft Summary

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[1] The research on which this paper is based was supported by grants (Award Numbers H023C10088-92A and H0 23C40102-95) from the Research in Education of Individuals with Disabilities Program (CFDA Number: 84-023C), Division in Innovation and Development, Office of Special Education Programs, the U.S. Department of Education to Erling E. Boe at the University of Pennsylvania; by the National Center for Education Statistics, the U.S. Department of Education; and by the Center for Research and Evaluation in Social Policy, the Graduate School of Education of the University of Pennsylvania.

Introduction

There has been considerable concern in the field of special education about securing and retaining a fully-qualified teaching force. The concern has been fueled by many reports over the past 15-20 years of factors that create a considerable annual demand for new hires of special education teacher (SETs) to fill open positions. The factors commonly cited that generate such annual demand are:

- Relatively high rates of attrition of SETs in comparison with general education teachers (GETs),
- Shortage of fully-qualified SETs to fill open positions, which results in the hiring of many individuals of lesser qualifications--thereby leaving a continuing demand for fully-qualified teachers, and
- The relatively rapid expansion of teaching positions in special education in comparison with general education.

One major solution to the problem of shortage of fully-qualified SETs has been the prospect of reducing attrition (i.e., improving retention) of such teachers. Until recently, however, it has not been possible to quantify the extent and nature of the teacher shortage problem in the field of special education as a whole because detailed national data have not been available. That has changed in recent years with the arrival of teacher data from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), and its companion Teacher Followup Survey (TFS), of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The purpose of this report, therefore, is to use these new data sources to analyze, from a national perspective, the specific components of retention, transfer, and attrition of SETs in comparison with GETs. Better information should assist policy makers and administrators design more effective intervention strategies targeting teacher shortage problems.

Method

The research reported here is based on SASS (1990-91) and TFS (1992) data for public school teachers. SASS provides for nationally representative estimates of the numbers and attributes of teachers in both public and private sector schools in 1990-91, while TFS, a longitudinal component of SASS, provides detailed information about job changes made by teachers for the following year (i.e., 1991-92). Therefore, it is possible to identify the numbers and types of teachers retained in, and leaving, the field from one year to the next. More specifically, the components of the public school teaching force analyzed are described below.

Teaching Field Retention. Teaching field retention refers to SETs and GETs in 1990-91 who continued in their respective main teaching fields during 1991-92.

Teaching Field Transfer. Teaching field transfer refers to SETs who transferred from 1990-91 to 1991-92 to general education as their main teaching field, and GETs who similarly transferred to special education.

Attrition. SETs and GETs in 1990-91 who left public school teaching for 1991-92 constituted the attrition component. This included public school teachers (K through 12) in 1990-91 who left to teach pre-kindergarten and to teach in a private school in 1991-92.

School Retention. School retention refers to SETs and GETs in 1990-91 (a) who continued in their respective main teaching fields in 1991-92, and (b) who also remained in their same school in 1991-92.

School Reassignment. School reassignment refers to SETs and GETs in 1990-91 (a) who continued in their respective main teaching fields in 1991-92, but (b) who where reassigned (either voluntarily or involuntarily) to a different school in their home district in 1991-92.

District Migration. District migration refers to SETs and GETs in 1990-91 (a) who continued in their respective main teaching fields in 1991-92, but (b) who migrated to a different district in 1991-92. District migration was subdivided into teachers who (a) migrated to a different school district within the same state and (b) those who migrated to a school district in a different state.

District Retention. District retention refers to SETs and GETs in 1990-91 (a) who continued in their respective main teaching fields in 1991-92, and (b) who remained in the same district in 1991-92. This category is composed of the sum of the school retention and school reassignment components defined above.

District Attrition. District attrition refers to SETs and GETs in 1990-91 (a) who continued in their respective main teaching fields in 1991-92, but (b) who left their home district in 1991-92. This category is composed of the sum of the district migration and attrition components defined above.

Entering Teachers. Entering teachers were defined as individuals who where not teaching in either public or private schools during 1990-91, and who commenced teaching in a public school during 1991-92. Entering teachers include both reentering experienced teachers and first-time teachers.

Private School Migrants. Private school migrants were defined as individuals teaching in private schools during 1990-91, and who migrated to teaching positions in public schools during 1991-92.

The district retention and district attrition components of the teaching force were further analyzed in accordance with the location of schools stratified by four levels of the urbanicity variable, as described below:

Urban. Central city of a standardized metropolitan area.

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Suburban/Large Town. An urban fringe of a standardized metropolitan area, and town with a population greater than 24,999 not located inside a standardized metropolitan area.

Small Town. A town with a population from 2,500 to 24,999 not located inside a standardized metropolitan area.

Rural. A place with fewer than 2,500, or a place designated as rural by the U.S. Bureau of Census.

Results[1]

What percentage of teachers are retained in their main teaching field from one year to the next, what percentage leave, and where do they go?

Figure 1 shows that 89% of SETs are retained as SETs from one year to the next, while of the 11% that leave annually, 5% transfer to general education and 6% leave the teaching profession (i.e., attrition). In comparison, only a very small percent (0.4%) of GETs transfer to special education and about the same percentage of GETs as SETs (5% vs. 6%) leave the profession. Therefore, the major source of the difference between SET and GET retention (as of 1992) is the much higher rate of transfer between the two main teaching fields. However, in absolute terms, about 15,000 SETs transferred to general education, while about 9,000 GETs transferred to special education. The difference represents a net loss of 6,000 SETs to general education.

Of SETs and GETs that are retained in their respective main teaching fields from one year to the next, to what extent do these teachers move to a different school?

Figure 2 shows that 92% of SETs remain as teachers in the same school from one year to the next, while most of the rest (6%) accept reassignment to a different school in the same district. This represents 98% district retention. Of the remainder, only 2% of SETs migrated to other districts in the same state, while 1% migrated to public schools in a different state. The pattern of school retention, reassignment, and migration of GETs did not differ significantly from that of GETs. It is important to note, however, that from a district perspective, out-migration is a form of attrition. It might actually be reported as attrition by districts, whereas it does not represent a loss to the national teaching force in special education. Similarly, migration out-of-state is typically classified as attrition in studies of retention and attrition at the state level because state data bases do not ordinarily record the destination of teachers that leave the state. Therefore, reports of attrition percentages from states are somewhat inflated from the national perspective.

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[1] All differences between SETs and GETs discussed in this summary are statistically significant. Percentages presented in Figures 1 through 4 may not add to 100% due to rounding to the nearest whole percent.

Of SETs and GETs that are retained in their respective main teaching fields from one year to the next, does the retention of teachers within a district depend on the level of urbanicity of the school location?

Figure 3 presents information about district retention (i.e., school retention plus reassignment to a different school in the same district) percentages of SETs and GETs. These data show that there is no difference in the district retention as a function of urbanicity of school location, and no difference between SETs and GETs in this respect. While the nature of the problems entailed in retaining teachers within a district may vary, the magnitude of the district attrition problem appears to be constant across the urbanicity variable.

To what extent do different factors create annual demand for individuals to fill open teaching positions?

left half

The left half of Figure 4 shows that factors responsible for the annual demand for individuals to fill open teaching positions is quite different for special education than general education. The major difference is due to the relatively high rate of transfer of SETs to general education in comparison with transfer of GETs to special education. The data show that 40% of teaching positions open annually in special education are created by teachers that move to general education, while only 8% of the open positions in general education are created by defections to special education. It is possible that efforts to promote retention in special education might have to address the problems of transfer and attrition by different means.

To what extent do different sources produce the annual supply of individuals to fill open teaching positions?

The right half of Figure 4 shows that sources of the annual supply of individuals to fill open teaching positions is quite different for special education than general education. The major difference is due to the greater importance of the transfer of GETs to special education in comparison with transfer of SETs to general education. The data show that 29% of teaching positions open annually in special education are filled by teachers that transfer in from general education, while only 10% of the open positions in general education are filled by teachers defecting from special education.

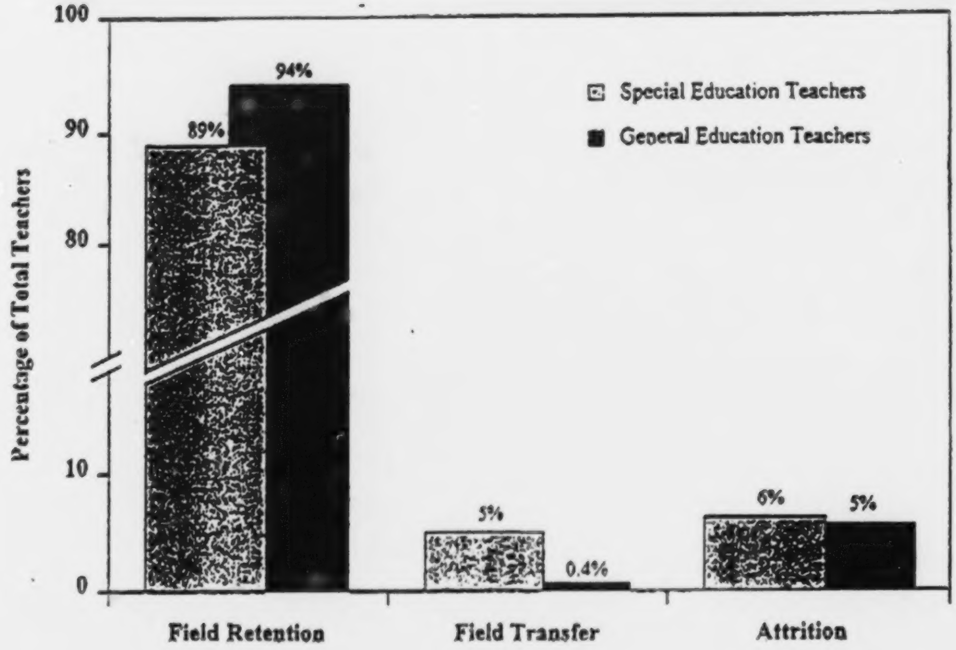

Figure 1. Teaching field retention, transfer, and attrition of public school teachers from 1990-91 to 1991-92 by main teaching field, as percentages of total special education teachers and total general education teachers in 1990-1991.

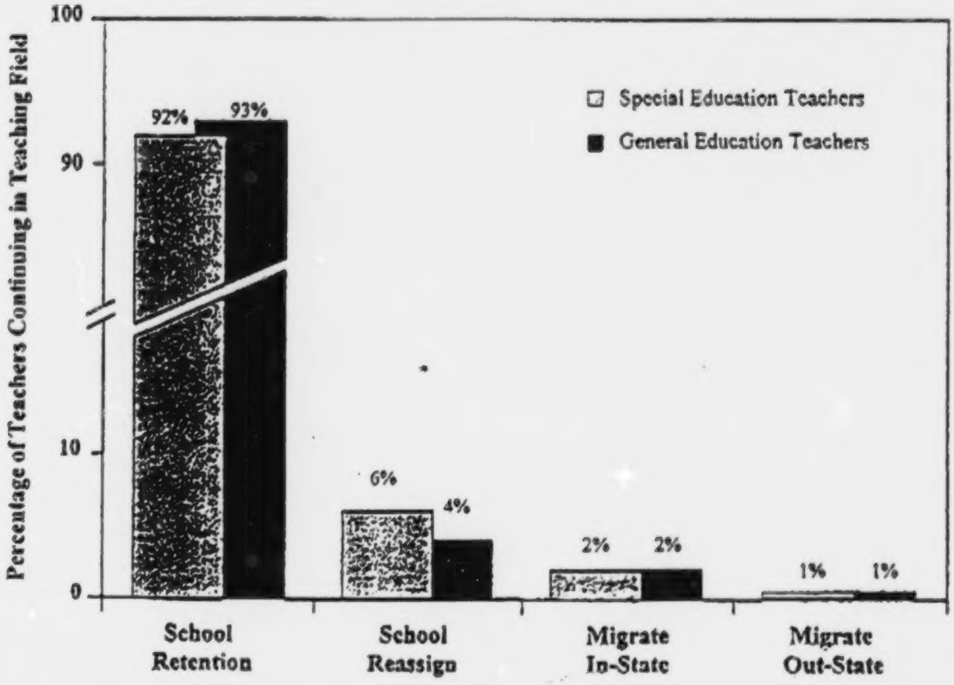

Figure 2. School retention, school reassignment within the same district, and school migration to other in-state and out-of-state districts, of public school teachers from 1990-91 to 1991-92 by main teaching field, as percentages of special education teachers and general education teachers continuing in their main teaching field.

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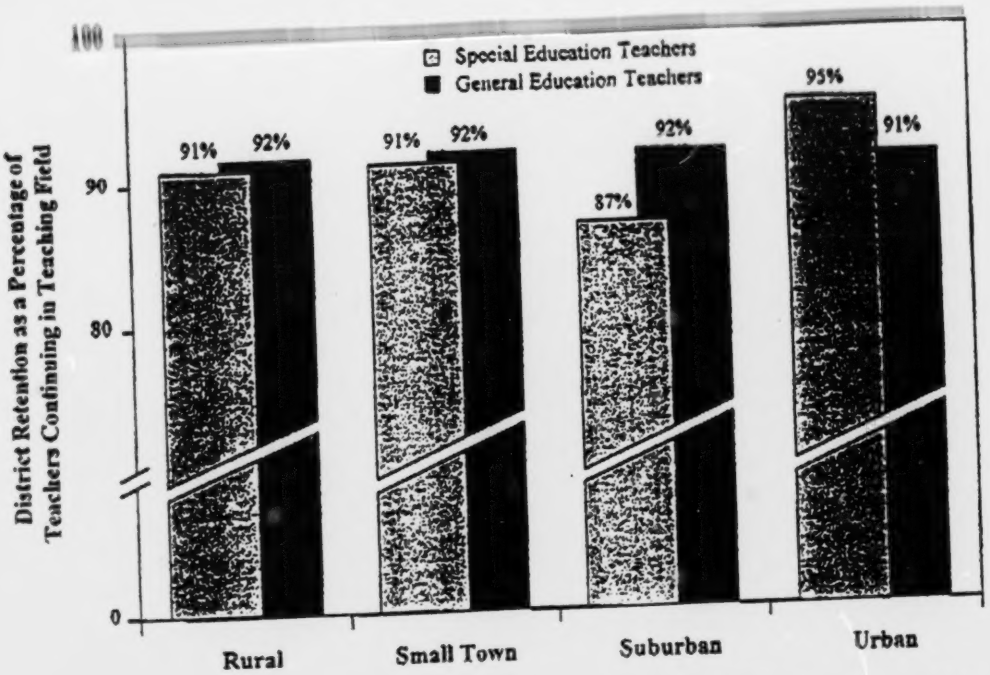

Figure 3. District retention of public school teachers from 1990-91 to 1991-92 by urbanicity of school location (rural, small town, suburban/large town, and urban) and main teaching field, as a percentage of special education teachers and general education teachers continuing in their main teaching field.

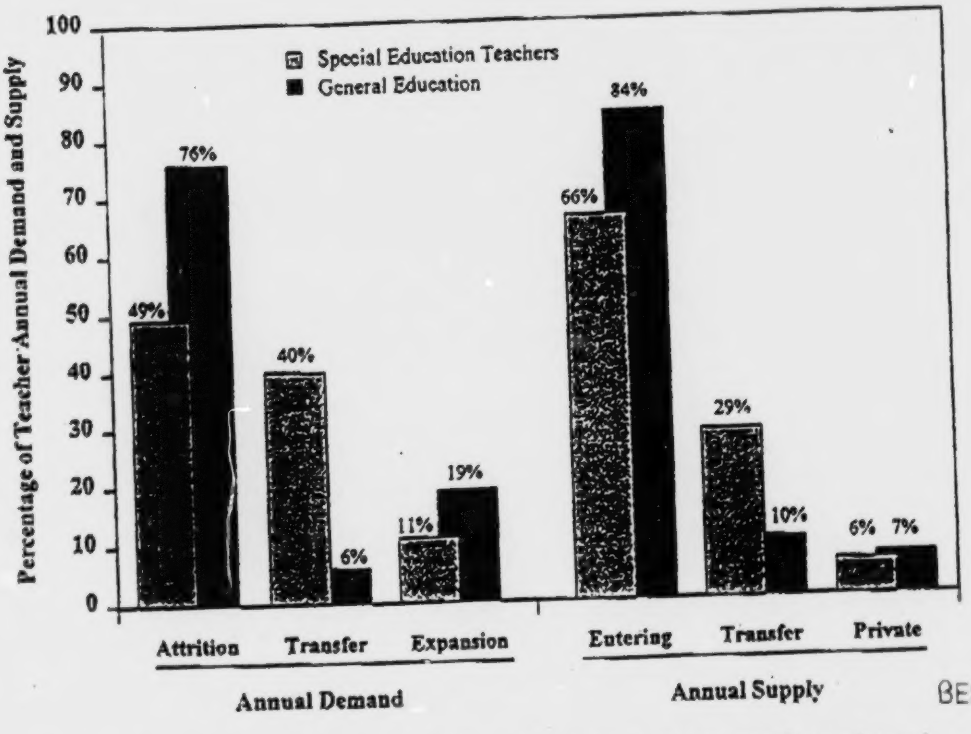

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Figure 4. Sources of annual demand for public school teachers (attrition, transfer to other main teacher field, and expansion of teaching positions) as percentages of total annual demand, compared with sources of annual supply of public school teachers (entering teachers, transfer from the other main teaching field, and migration from private schools) as percentages of total annual supply, by main teaching field.

WORKING PAPER # 3

The Attrition Picture: Lessons From Three Research Projects

Prepared by

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for the

NATIONAL DISSEMINATION FORUM
Special Education Teacher Satisfaction, Retention, and Attrition

May 25-26, 1995

Attrition in Selected School Districts

INTRODUCTION

The study of teacher attrition and retention is important in this era of special education teacher shortages. Many teachers do not want to teach in urban settings (Feistritzer, 1990) and Haberman (1987) reports that the number of teachers leaving is markedly higher in urban schools. As a result, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), Department of Education, has a substantial interest in issues related to the retention of special education teachers.

In October 1991, OSEP awarded cooperative agreements to three organizations to conduct three-year research and development projects related to the attrition of special education teachers in large urban school districts. Each award had a similar purpose, i.e., to: (a) determine each district's attrition rates for special education teachers; (b) describe the broad range of forces, including factors related to personnel preparation, that are contributing to the attrition rates; and (c) use the resulting research findings to assist each district in developing a strategic action plan to enhance the retention of its special education teachers. This document presents and discusses the findings of one component of these research projects, i.e., the computation of attrition rates.

The recipients of the OSEP cooperative agreements and the districts with which they worked are:

- The Eugene Research Institute (ERI) worked with three districts located in the western United States. The names of these districts are confidential and are noted in this document as ERI Districts 1, 2, and 3.
- The Research Triangle Institute (RTI) worked with the Memphis City Schools in Tennessee.
- San Diego State University (SDSU) and its subcontractor, the American Institutes for Research (AIR), worked the San Diego and San Jose Unified School Districts in California.
- SDSU and AIR also analyzed teacher attrition data from the California Basic Education Data System (CBEDS), a statewide electronic file that contains personnel assignment information for about 80% of the school districts in California. (Districts are required to use teachers' social security numbers to participate in CBEDS, and

several districts, including San Diego and San Jose, decided not to participate in CBEDS.)

CBEDS data is a large data base that the California State Department of Education developed (and maintains) from data reported on the Personal Assignment Information Form that is administered to all of the State's educators. The attrition rate data for the other six participating districts were gathered, scrutinized, and edited for duplications and inconsistencies by the responsible research organization (RTI, ERI, SDSU, or AIR). Although there are differences in the way CBEDS and the data bases for our six districts were developed, we have included the CBEDS attrition rate findings as an external reference or benchmark for interpreting the attrition rates for our urban districts.

Attrition rates for our data bases are available for the following school years:

	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
Memphis				X	X	X
San Jose				X	X	X
San Diego				X	X	X
ERI districts					X	X
CBEDS	X	X	X			

Exhibit 1 provides a basic description of each of the six districts in terms of the demographic characteristics of its students and teachers. (All referenced exhibits have been placed at the end of this document for the reader's convenience.) Districts were selected based on their availability. They include sites with a broad range of student and teacher demographics, characteristics and geographical contexts. Since districts were not randomly selected, however, it is uncertain to what extent findings may be generalized to all urban districts.

Section II of this document presents our definitions of leavers and related limitations. The attrition rates for the districts are presented and discussed in Section III. Characteristics of the exited special education teachers are presented in Section IV. Insights into the employment status of the leavers the year after they exited are presented in Section V. Summary statements or "bullets" are included in each of Sections III, IV, and V, as opposed to presenting a separate summary section.

DEFINITIONS AND LIMITATIONS

It is difficult to compare and interpret the attrition rates reported for school districts across the nation because of differences in defining "teachers" and "attrition," the methodology used to collect and analyze attrition data, and a lack of comparability in the years for which the data are reported. We were able to minimize these types of problems by coordinating and sharing our research approaches and findings throughout the course of this study. We used similar approaches to obtain and compute attrition data for the six study districts (CBEDS data were obtained differently but the attrition rates were computed the same as in the six districts). However, there are minor differences across districts in how a special education teacher or leaver was defined and the subgroups of teachers for which rates were computed.

For purposes of this study, a leaver was defined as a full-time or part-time special education teacher who left his/her position in the targeted year and was no longer working in that capacity at the start of the subsequent school year. This definition includes those special education teachers who terminated their employment in the district, as well as those who remained employed in the district but in another position, e.g., those who may have transferred to a general education teaching or to supervisory or administrative positions within the district.

Within this general definition, there is a difference between the three ERI districts and the other data bases as to what constitutes "leaving a position." ERI did not include as leavers those teachers who were officially listed as being on a leave of absence, unless they did not return at the end of their leave period. In CBEDS and the other study districts, these personnel were included as leavers, whether or not they returned.

There is variation across districts with respect to flexibility in including speech pathologists, deaths, and retirements in computing special education rates. This flexibility is summarized below. A "yes" means that the specified group must be included in the district's rates, a "no" means it can not be included, and a "yes/no" means that the rates can be computed both with and without the group.

	Speech Pathologists	Deaths	Retirements
Memphis	Yes	Yes/No	Yes/No
ERI Districts	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
San Jose	No	Yes/No	Yes/No
San Diego	No	Yes/No	Yes/No
CBEDS	Yes/No	Yes	Yes

About 13% of Memphis' special education teachers are speech pathologists and an examination of the exit data suggests that the exit rates of speech pathologists do not differ significantly from the rates of the other special education teachers. Therefore the inclusion of this group should not have a significant impact on comparisons of Memphis' attrition rates with the rates of other districts that do not include speech pathologists.

Although these variations limited the types of "cross-district" comparisons that could be made, the flexibility of being able to include or exclude certain groups in computing exit rates enabled us to make maximum use of our data bases in comparing attrition rates across the study districts. A complete analyses of each data set is presented in the individual final reports prepared the by participating research organizations.

ATTRITION RATES

A. Overall Special Education Attrition Rates

1. Findings

Exhibit 2 presents the exit rates that were available for school years 1990-91, 1991-92, and/or 1992-93. These rates are presented in this exhibit for two groups of leavers. The top portion of the exhibit presents the rates for *all the leavers*, whereas the lower portion presents those for *voluntary leavers*, i.e., those who did not leave because of death, retirement, or Rifts (reductions in force). The rates for *all leavers* and *voluntary leavers* are depicted as bar graphs in Exhibits 3 and 4, respectively.

An average annual attrition rate was computed for each district. These "weighted" average rates are presented in Exhibit 5 for two major groups of leavers, i.e., *all leavers* and *voluntary leavers*. Overall attrition rates for each of the two groups are also included in Exhibit 5 (in the "totals" rows). Two sets of total rates are presented for all leavers; one for CBEDS data combined with the six study districts, and one for the six study districts. This was done because the large number of teachers in the CBEDS districts has a significant influence on the overall rate for the six primary urban districts, i.e., the 9.1% average attrition rate for the six districts raises to 13.9% when combined with the 24.2% attrition rate experienced by the set of California's urban districts included in CBEDS.

These average annual rates are depicted as bar graphs in Exhibit 6. The columns entitled "Totals 1" in this exhibit present the totals for the six districts, whereas the columns entitled "Totals 2" present the totals for the six districts plus the CBEDS Urban Districts.

2. Summary

- In four of the six districts, the attrition rates for "all leavers" and "voluntary leavers" increased over the two- or three-period for which data were gathered. San Diego and San Jose were exceptions to this trend (see Exhibits 2, 3, and 4).
- In general, 1% to 2% of the special ed teachers ~~leavers~~ in each of the six districts left their positions because of death, retirement, or reductions in force.
- With the exception of ERI District 2, the exit rates for the six districts are fairly similar, e.g., the average rates for all leavers range from 7.4% to 10.3% and the rates for voluntary leavers range from 5.6% to 8.3% (see Exhibits 5 and 6). The exit rates for ERI District 2 are about 3 percentage points higher than the top of these ranges.
- The rates for all six districts were well below many previously reported special education teacher attrition rates, some of which are as high as 30% (Morvant,

Gersten, Gillman, Keating, & Blake, 1995). As previously noted, it is difficult and often misleading to compare and interpret attrition rates across studies. According to Morvant, et al.:

> An examination of existing research on special education attrition reveals a wide variety of approaches to defining both "teacher" and "attrition." In addition, some studies, such as these [the six studies and the CBEDS analysis} have applied a district focus; others have assumed a state focus (i.e., a teacher is only counted as a leaver if he/she is no longer teaching special education *within that state*); and still others have focused on a particular special education program (e.g., teachers working with students classified as seriously emotionally disturbed).

- The rates for the six urban districts in our study are substantially lower than the comparable rates for the urban districts in CBEDS. For example, the average attrition rate for all leavers in the six districts was 9.1%, as compared to a 24.2% attrition rate for the CBEDS urban districts (Exhibits 5 and 6). These findings indicate that, on the average, the six study districts will need to replace about 45% of their special education teaching force if these annual rates persist.

- Interestingly, the rates for the San Diego and San Jose Unified School Districts, the two large California urban districts that were included in our study but not in CBEDS, are also substantially lower than their CBEDS counterparts. Possible reasons for these differences are that:

    - The CBEDS results are for the school years 1987-88 through 1989-90, and the rates for the six participating districts are for 1990-91 through 1992-93. It is possible that teacher attrition rates changed over time, perhaps because of the impact that changing economic conditions have had on job opportunities.

    - Since the six study districts were not randomly selected, their attrition rates may not be representative of the rates for other urban school districts across the nation.

B. Comparison of Attrition Rates for Special and General Education Teachers

Comparable attrition rates for special and general education teachers were available in Memphis and CBEDS. The Memphis rates were computed for school years 1990-91 through 1992-93, and CBEDS rates were computed for school years 1987-88 through 1989-90. Attrition rates were computed for three subgroups of CBEDS districts: large urban, small urban, and suburban. Since it was not possible to compute CBEDS rates that excluded those teachers who are leavers because of death or retirement, only the rates for *all leavers* (including speech therapists) were computed and compared.

1. Findings

The annual attrition rates for Memphis and each of the three CBEDS subgroups are presented in Exhibit 7. These annual rates were also averaged to provide an average annual rate for Memphis and each of the subgroups of CBEDS districts. These average annual rates are presented in Exhibit 8.

2. Summary

- In Memphis, there is little difference in the attrition rates for special and general education teachers (all leavers), i.e., the average rates over three years for special and general educators are 7.4% and 7.6%, respectively (see Exhibit 8).
- There is a significant difference between the attrition rates of special and general educators in the CBEDS districts; i.e., the rates for special education teachers are 8.7 to 11.4 percentage points higher than their general education peers. Stated another way, the average attrition rates of general educators are 54% to 62.2% as large as the rates of special educators (see Exhibit 8).
- Within CBEDS, the special education attrition rates for the large urban districts are the highest, followed in descending order by small urban and suburban districts (see Exhibit 8). This pattern was not followed for general education rates, e.g., the attrition rates for small urban districts were higher than the other two types of districts.
- When the large urban, small urban, and suburban districts in CBEDS are combined, the average annual attrition rate for *general education* teachers is 12.7% versus 23.2% for *special educators* (see Exhibit 8).
- The average attrition rate for CBEDS *general education* teachers is 3.6 percentage points higher than the 9.1% average attrition rate for *special education* teachers in the six participating districts (see Exhibit 5).

CHARACTERISTICS OF EXITED SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

A. Findings

The findings presented in Exhibits 9 and 10 provide insight into the characteristics of leavers in the six participating districts. Exhibit 9 describes the leavers in terms of their gender and race/ethnicity. Exhibit 10 describes leavers in terms of their age, years of experience in the "exited district," and total years of teaching experience (special and general education). The findings presented in these exhibits exclude those teachers who left their positions because of death or retirement.

B. Summary

- A large majority of leavers were female, which is not unexpected since the majority of special education teachers are female.
- With the exception of Memphis, the mean ages of leavers from the other districts are quite similar. The mean age of leavers in Memphis was 36.8 years, which is at least two years lower than the mean exit age in the in the other districts (see Exhibit 10).
- The mean years of "experience in the district" for leavers from Memphis and the three ERI districts are similar, but they are slightly lower than the values for this variable in San Jose and San Diego (see Exhibit 10).
- The greatest variation across the six districts occurred in total years of teaching experience. In Memphis, 43% of the leavers had 4 years of less of total teaching experience, followed by San Jose with 38.9% and ERI District 2 with 28.%. The percents for the other three districts were significantly lower, with a low of 7.1% in ERI District 3.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS AFTER LEAVING

A. Findings

Exhibit 11 describes the employment status of leavers the year after they exited. This description is presented from a district perspective, i.e., leavers are classified as to whether or not they *stayed in* or *left* the district from which they exited. This exhibit gives the percentages of teachers in various employment "categories" within the two broad categories of "stayed in district" and "left the district." For example, 56% of the special education teachers who exited their special education teaching positions in ERI District 1 remained in that district, and 44% left the district. The 56% of the teachers who remained in the district were distributed as follows: 46% transferred to general education teaching, 6% transferred to non-teaching special education positions, and 4% transferred to non-teaching general education positions. (Note that data regarding the employment status of teachers in the two broad categories were not available for Memphis, and data regarding the employment status of teachers who "left the district" were not available for the CBEDS districts.)

Exhibit 12 is a bar graph that depicts a portion of the data presented in Exhibit 11, i.e., the percentages of exited teachers who remain and leave the study's districts.

Exhibit 13 presents the employment status of teachers using the broader perspective of classifying leavers as to whether or not they remain employed in education or left the field of education. For example, 59.3% of the leavers in ERI District 1 remained employed in education, versus 36.7% who left the field of education. The 59.3% of the ERI District 1 leavers who remained employed in education were distributed as follows: 46% accepted general education teaching positions, 7.3% transferred to special education teaching in another district, and 6% were in administrative or other education positions. The results are averaged across the six districts and presented in the "Totals" column. Related CBEDS data are not available.

Exhibit 14 is a bar graph of the percentages of exited teachers who "stayed in" or "left" education. These percentages are depicted for each study district, as well as for totals across districts.

B. Summary

- There was considerable variation across districts in the percentage of leavers who remained employed in their "exited" districts, ranging from a low of 13.3% in San Jose to a high of 56% in ERI District 1 (see Exhibit 12).
- The majority of leavers who remained in their "exited" districts transferred to general education teaching positions (see Exhibit 11).
- Most of the leavers who left their "exited" districts either retired or continued teaching special education (see Exhibit 11).
- There was also considerable variation across districts in the percentages of leavers who stayed in the field of education. These percentages ranged from a low of 56.5% in San Jose to a high of 83.2% in ERI District 3, with an average of 67.7% across districts (see Exhibit 14).
- Of the 67.7% of the leavers who remained in the field of education, about one-half (or 30.1%) continued teaching special education, 23.4 percent transferred to general education teaching, and 14.4% were in administrative or other education positions (see the "Totals" column in Exhibit 13).

REFERENCES

Feistritzer, C. E. (1990). Profile of teachers in the U.S. Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Information.

Haberman, M. (1987). Recruiting and selecting teachers for urban schools. New York, NY: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. (ED 292 942)

Morvant, M., Gersten, R., Gillman, J., Keating, T., & Blake, G. (1995). Attrition/Retention of Urban Special Education Teachers: Multi-Faceted Research and Strategic Action Planning. Eugene Research Institute.

Exhibit 1

Participating School Districts: 1992-93 School Year Characteristics

	Memphis, TN	ERI District 1	ERI District 2	ERI District 3	San Diego,CA	San Jose, CA
Students in K-12						
Total Enrollment	104,947	57,700	64,047	56,282	128,000	28,436
Racial/Ethnic Mix						
Euro-Amer	20%	51%	22%	69%	31%	36%
Afric-Amer	79%	8%	5%	16%	17%	7%
Hispanic	<1%	33%	72%	5%	33%	43%
Other	<1%	8%	1%	10%	20%	14%
Spec Ed Enrollment	11,619	2,116	5,600	7,316	13,000	2,559
Teachers						
# of Spec Ed Staff*	629	363/425	304/360	225/284	730/850	172/NA
# of Gen Ed Staff	4,808	3,012	3,481	3,362	4,900	1,259
Racial/Ethnic Mix						
Euro-Amer	61%	89%	56%	91%	89%	90%
Afric-Amer	38%	2%	4%	1%	3%	1%
Hispanic	<1%	8%	37%	1%	3%	1%
Other	<1%	1%	3%	7%	5%	9%

* Numbers prior to "/" are special ed teachers only; those after the "/" include speech therapists. Memphis includes speech therapists.

Exhibit 2

Comparison of 1990-91, 1991-92, and 1992-93 Attrition Rates for Special Education Teachers* in Participating Districts
(Rates Are Presented With and Without the Inclusion of Retirees and Deceased Leavers)

	1990-91 School Year		1991-92 School Year		1992-93 School Year	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Exit Rates for All Leavers						
Memphis, TN*	622	6.6	629	7.0	646	8.7
ERI District One	***	***	363	6.1	389	8.0
ERI District Two	***	***	304	12.8	324	13.3
ERI District Three	***	***	225	7.6	235	8.9
San Diego Unified, CA	744	12.2	740	9.9	727	8.7
San Jose, CA	164	9.2	168	7.1	171	9.4
Totals	1,526	9.6	2,429	8.5	2,492	9.3
CBEDS Urban Districts	2,994	24.2	***	***	***	***
Exit Rates Excluding Rifted, Deceased, & Retired Leavers**						
Memphis, TN	622	5.8	629	6.5	646	7.9
ERI District One	***	***	363	3.9	389	7.2
ERI District Two	***	***	304	10.9	324	12.7
ERI District Three	***	***	225	6.7	235	8.1
San Diego Unified, CA	744	7.9	740	9.2	727	7.2
San Jose, CA	164	6.7	168	6.0	171	7.6
Totals	1,526	6.9	2,429	7.5	2,492	8.4

* The rates for Memphis include speech therapists; rates for the other districts do not.

** These rates were not available for CBEDS.

*** Attrition data not available for year.

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Exhibit 3

Annual Attrition Rates: All Leavers

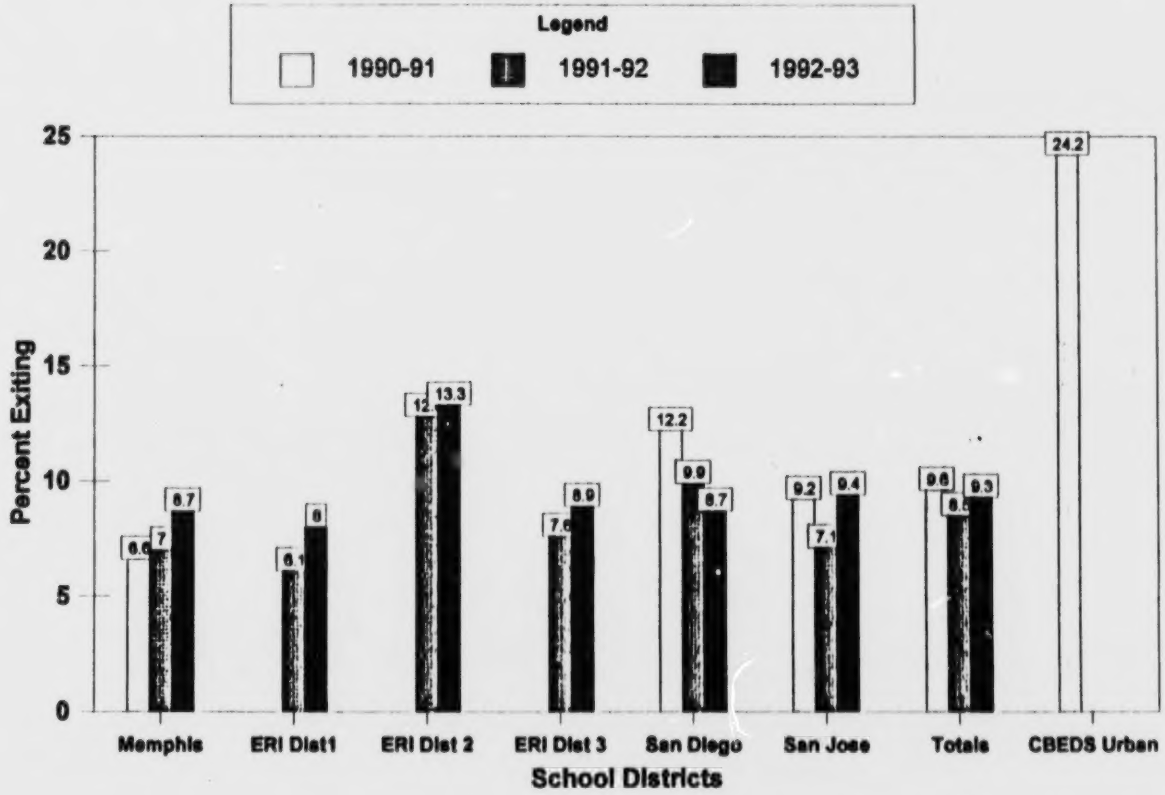

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Exhibit 4

Annual Rates: Voluntary Leavers

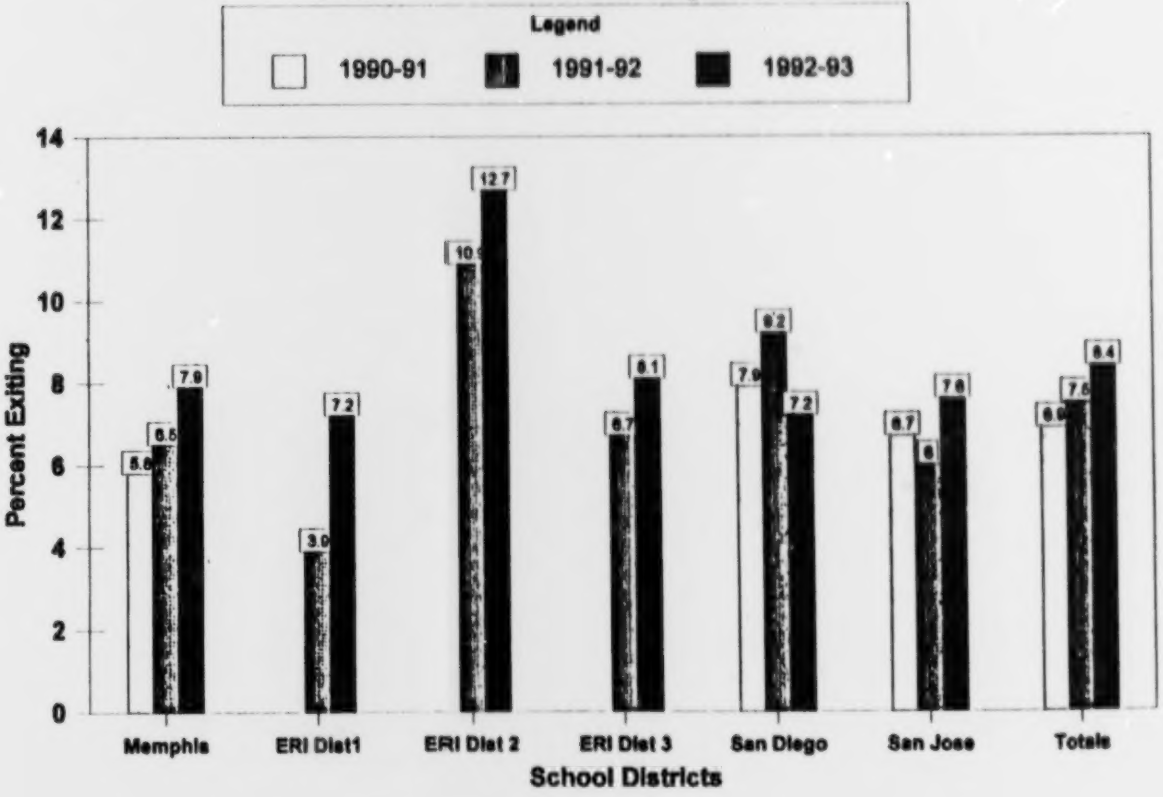

Exhibit 5

Comparison of Attrition Rates Averaged Across Years for Special Education Teachers* in Participating Districts
(Rates Are Presented With and Without the Inclusion of Retirees and Deceased Leavers)

	Totals Across School Years	
	Total Teachers	Percent Leaving
Exit Rates for All Leavers		
Memphis, TN	1,897	7.4%
ERI District One	752	7.1%
ERI District Two	628	13.1%
ERI District Three	460	8.3%
San Diego Unified, CA	2,207	10.3%
San Jose, CA	503	8.6%
Totals	6,447	9.1%
CBEDS Urban Districts	8,992 ~~2,994~~	24.2%
Totals, Including CBEDS Urban Districts	15,429 ~~9,441~~	~~13.9%~~ 17.9%
Exit Rates Exclude Rifted, Deceased, & Retired Leavers**		
Memphis, TN	1,897	6.7%
ERI District One	752	5.6%
ERI District Two	628	11.8%
ERI District Three	460	7.4%
San Diego Unified, CA	2,207	8.3%
San Jose, CA	503	6.8%
Totals	6,447	7.7%

* The rates for Memphis include speech therapists; rates for the other districts do not.

** These rates were not available for CBEDS.

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Exhibit 6

Average Annual Attrition Rates

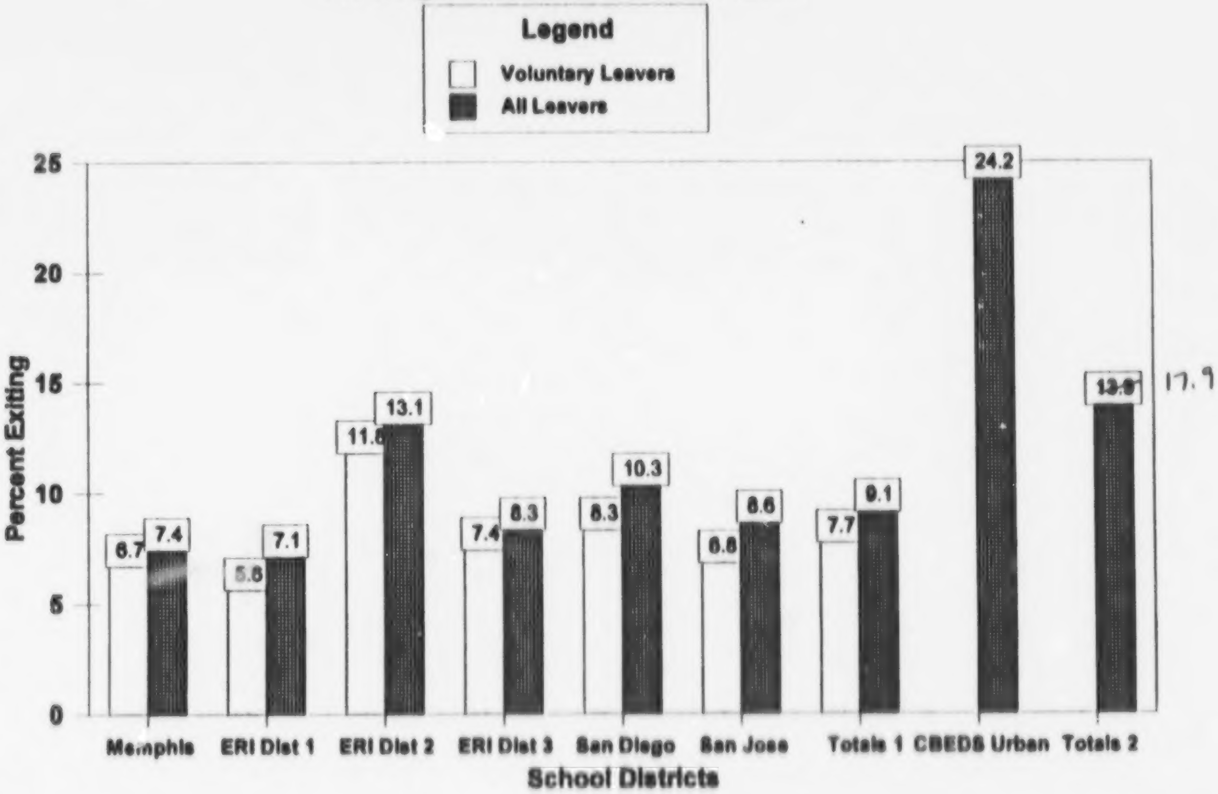


Exhibit 7

Comparison of Attrition Rates for Special and General Education Teachers in Memphis and Selected CBEDS Districts (Rates Include All Leavers, i.e., Speech Therapists, Deceased, and Retired)

	1987-88 School Year		1988-89 School Year		1989-90 School Year		1990-91 School Year		1991-92 School Year		1992-93 School Year	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Memphis, TN												
Special Education	•	•	•	•	•	•	622	6.6	629	7.0	646	8.7
General Education	•	•	•	•	•	•	4,898	6.6	4,808	8.1	5,006	8.3
CBEDS Large Urban Districts												
Special Education	1,878	23.7	1,863	27.2	1,964	24.8			•	•	•	•
General Education	19,417	12.7	19,671	14.6	20,687	14.4			•	•	•	•
CBEDS Small Urban Districts												
Special Education	1,000	23.9	987	22.3	1,035	22.8			•	•	•	•
General Education	10,856	14.9	10,596	13.6	10,867	14.3			•	•	•	•
CBEDS Suburban Districts												
Special Education	2,811	22.7	2,816	21.2	3,069	20.2			•	•	•	•
General Education	28,387	11.9	28,687	11.5	30,634	11.2			•	•	•	•
Totals												
Special Education	5,685	23.2	5,656	23.1	6,068	21.9	622	6.6	629	7.0	646	8.7
General Education	58,690	12.6	58,954	12.8	62,168	12.6	4,898	6.6	4,808	8.1	5,006	8.3

Exhibit 8

Comparison of Attrition Rates Totaled Across Years for Special and General Education Teachers in Memphis and Selected California Districts (Rates Include All Leavers, i.e., Speech Therapists, Deceased, and Retired)

	Totals Across School Years	
	Total Teachers	Percent Leaving
Memphis, TN		
Special Education	1,897	7.4%
General Education	14,712	7.6%
CBEDS Large Urban Districts		
Special Education	5,694	25.1%
General Education	59,755	13.9%
CBEDS Small Urban Districts		
Special Education	3,022	23.0%
General Education	32,349	14.3%
CBEDS Suburban Districts		
Special Education	8,696	21.3%
General Education	87,707	11.5%
Totals for CBEDS Urban and Suburban Districts		
Special Education	17,412	22.7%
General Education	179,811	12.7%

Exhibit 9

Characteristics of Exited Special Education Teachers, Excluding Those Who Exited Because of Death or Retirement, in Participating School Districts by Gender and Race/Ethnicity (Leavers for Each District Are Totals Over the Number of Years That Data Were Collected)

Teacher Characteristics	Memphis,TN* Leavers =128	ERI District 1 Leavers =42	ERI District 2 Leavers =74	ERI District 3 Leavers =34	San Diego,CA Leavers =132	San Jose, CA Leavers =28
Gender						
Male	3.9%	16.7%	21.6%	35.3%	22.7%	14.3%
Female	96.1%	83.3%	78.4%	64.7%	77.3%	85.7%
Race/Ethnicity						
European-American	74.2%	66.7%	58.1%	67.6%	86.2%	89.3%
African-American	23.4%	16.7%	4.1%	2.9%	4.6%	3.6%
Hispanic/Latino	0.0%	0.0%	28.4%	0.0%	4.6%	3.6%
Other	2.3%	0.0%	4.1%	2.9%	4.6%	3.6%
Data Unavailable	0.0%	16.7%	5.4%	26.5%	0.0%	0.0%

* Speech therapists are included in the Memphis data base, whereas they are not included in the data reported for the other districts.

Exhibit 10

Characteristics of Exited Special Education Teachers, Excluding Those Who Exited Because of Death or Retirement, in Participating School Districts by Age, Years of Teaching in District, and Total Years of Teaching Experience (Leavers for Each District Are Totals Over the Number of Years That Data Were Collected)

Teacher Characteristics	Memphis,TN Leavers = 128	ERI District 1 Leavers = 40	ERI District 2 Leavers = 60	ERI District 3 Leavers = 29	San Diego,CA Leavers = 145	San Jose,CA Leavers =36
Mean Age, as of January 1 of Exited School Year	36.8 Years	40.9 Years	39.0 Years	41.1 Years	40.3 Years	41.3 Years
Mean Years Experience in District	6.7 Years	6.8 Years	6.8 Years	6.5 Years	7.7 Years	8.1 Years
Total Teaching Yrs.						
4 Yrs or less	43.0%	10.0%	28.3%	7.1%	19.3%	38.9%
More than 4 Yrs	57.0%	90.0%	71.7%	92.9%	80.7%	61.1%

* Speech therapists are included in the Memphis data base, whereas they are not included in the data reported for the other districts. It is estimated that about 13% of Memphis' special education teachers are speech therapists; there is no reason to assume that their exit rates differ significantly from the other special education teachers.

Exhibit 11

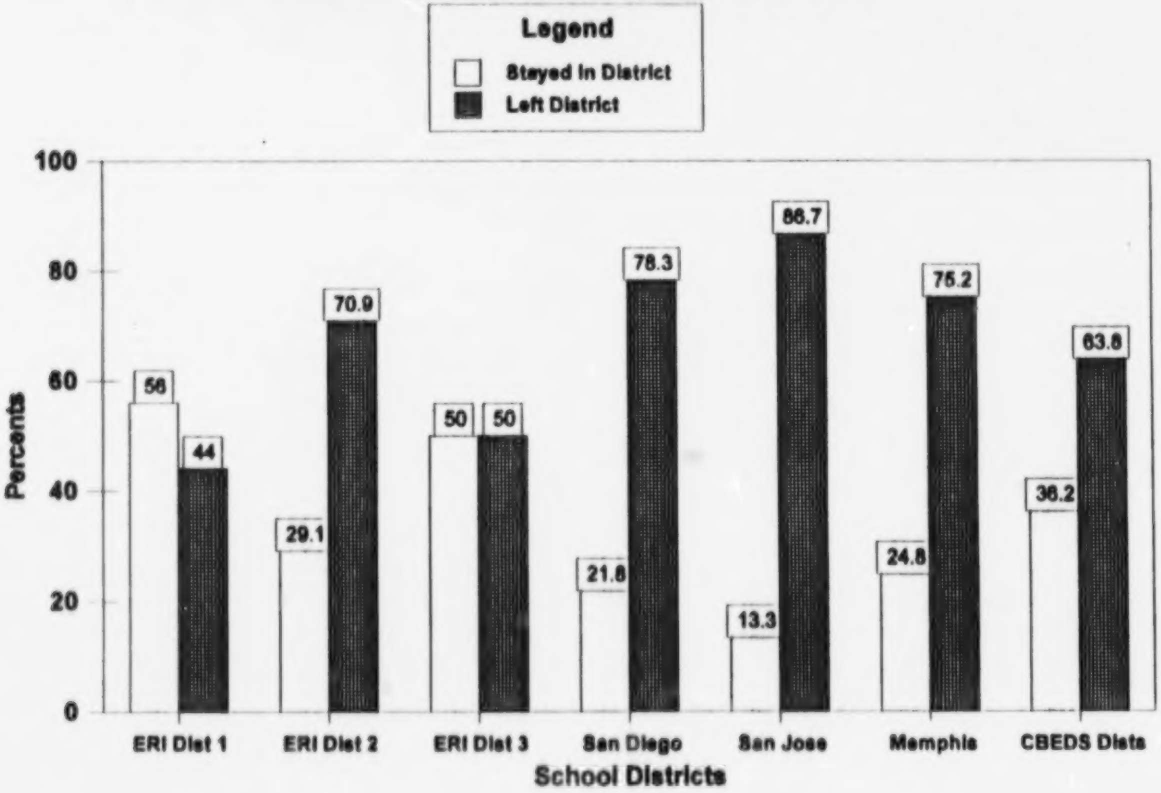
Employment Status of Leavers Immediately After Leaving, As a Percent of Leavers (Excludes Deaths and "Forced" Leavers)

	ERI Dist 1 (N=50)	ERI Dist 2 (N=79)	ERI Dist 3 (N=38)	San D, CA (N=179)	San Jose, CA (N=45)	Memphis, TN (N=137)	CBEDS Districts (N=3,713)
Item Response Rate	80.0%	75.9%	94.7%	100.0%	97.8%	100.0%	
Stayed in District	56.0%	29.1%	50.0%	21.8%	13.3%	24.8%	36.2%
Non-teaching Special Ed	6.0%	10.1%	7.9%	0.0%	0.0%	NA	2.0%
Non-teaching General Ed	4.0%	6.3%	5.3%	0.0%	0.0%	NA	11.0%
Teaching General Ed	46.0%	12.7%	36.9%	21.8%	13.3%	NA	23.1%
Left District	44.0%	70.9%	50.0%	78.3%	86.7%	75.2%	63.8%
Teaching Special Ed	7.3%	38.3%	31.0%	27.9%	25.0%	NA	NA
Non-Teaching Special Ed	0.0%	3.8%	0.0%	1.7%	4.5%	NA	NA
Teaching General Ed	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	1.7%	2.3%	NA	NA
Non-teaching General Ed	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	14.0%	11.4%	NA	NA
Other employment or seeking							
In related field	0.0%	0.0%	3.1%	NA	NA	NA	NA
In non-related field	3.7%	2.0%	3.1%	4.5%	4.5%	NA	NA
Unemployed, not seeking	3.7%	13.5	0.0%	7.8% *	9.1% *	NA	NA
Attending College or University	NA	NA	NA	0.6%	2.3%	NA	NA
Homemaking/child-rearing	NA	NA	NA	1.7%	6.9%	NA	NA
Retired	29.3%	9.5%	12.6%	18.4%	20.5%	6.6%	NA

* Unemployed--not known if person was seeking work. NOTE: Data are adjusted for nonresponse and may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Exhibit 12

Exiters Leaving and Staying in District



district

Exhibit 13

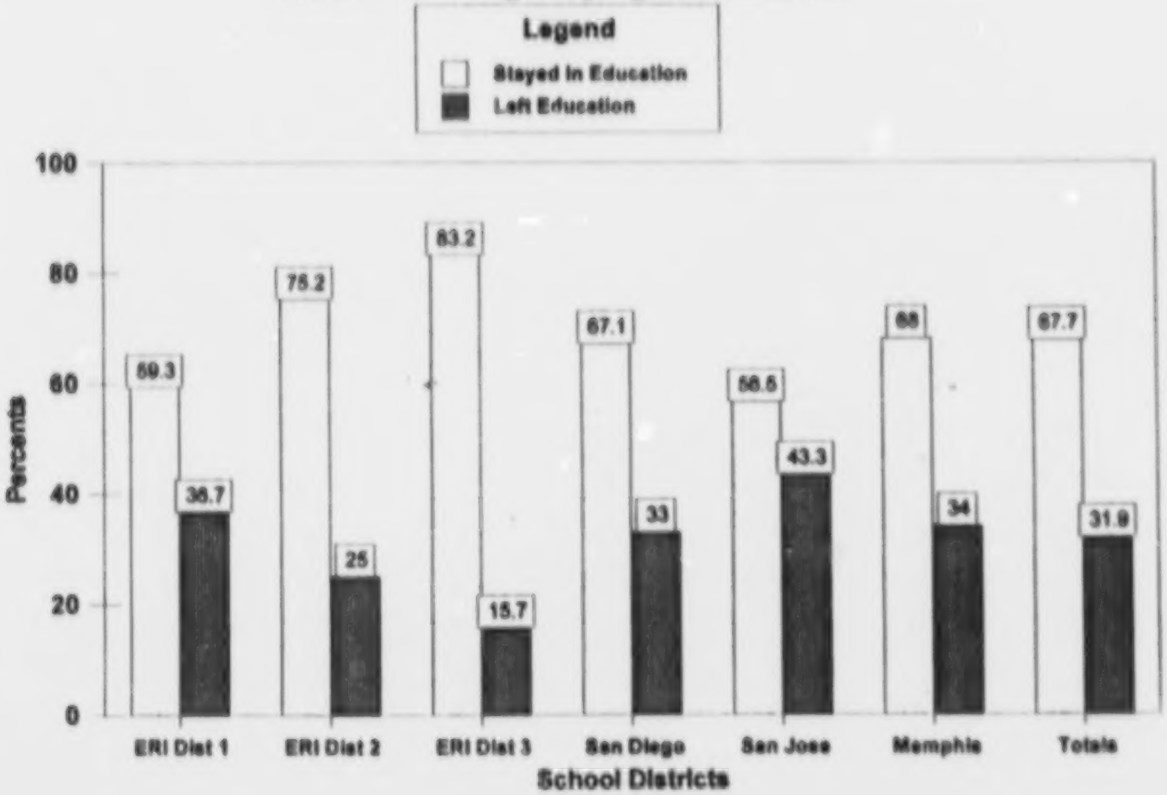
Employment Status of Leavers Immediately After Leaving, As a Percent of Leavers (Excludes Deaths and "Forced" Leavers)

	ERI District 1 (N=50)	ERI District 2 (N=79)	ERI Dist 3 (N=38)	San Diego, CA (N=179)	San Jose, CA (N=45)	Memphis, TN (N=137)	Totals (N=490)	
Item Response Rate	80.0%	74.7%	94.7%	100.0%	97.8%	72.3%		
Employed in Education	63.3 ~~59.3%~~	75.2%	84.2 ~~83.2%~~	67.1%	56.5%	66.0 ~~68.0%~~	~~67.7%~~	68.0%
Special Education Teaching	7.3%	38.3%	31.0%	27.9%	25.0%	41.0%	~~30.1%~~	30.9 %
General Education Teaching	46.0%	14.7%	36.9%	23.5%	15.6%	17.0%	~~23.4%~~	22.9
Administration/Other	6.0%	22.2%	15.3%	15.7%	15.9%	8.0%	~~14.2%~~	14.2 sam
Left Education	36.7%	25.0%	15.7%	33.0%	43.3%	34.0%	~~31.9%~~	32.0
Homemaking/child-rearing	NA	NA	NA	1.7%	6.9%	11%	3.5%	
Non-Related Occupation (or seeking)	3.7%	2.0%	3.1%	4.5%	4.5%	8.0%	4.6%	
Unemployed, Seeking Work	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	2.0%	0.4%	
Unemployed, Not Seeking	3.7%	13.5%	NA	NA	NA	NA	2.6%	
Unemployed (Not Known If Seeking)	NA	NA	NA	7.8%	9.1%	NA	3.7%	
Attending College/University	NA	NA	NA	0.6%	2.3%	2.0%	0.8%	
Other	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	3.0%	0.6%	
Retired	29.3%	9.5%	12.6%	18.4%	20.5%	8.0%	15.7%	

NOTE: Data are adjusted for nonresponse, and totals may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Exhibit 14

Exiters Leaving/Staying in Education



WORKING PAPER # 4

Working Conditions: Job Design

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NATIONAL DISSEMINATION FORUM
Special Education Teacher Satisfaction, Retention, and Attrition

May 25-26, 1995

Teachers' Perceptions of Working Conditions

Section 1: Impact of Job Design on Stress, Commitment, and Intent to Leave

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Paper presented at National Dissemination Forum on Issues Relating to
Special Education Teacher Satisfaction, Retention, and Attrition
Washington, D.C.
May 1995

Teachers' Perceptions of Working Conditions
Section 1: Impact of Job Design on Stress, Commitment and Intent to Leave

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This summary report presents an integration of major findings on teachers' perceptions of their working conditions based on survey and interview data from special educators in six large urban districts located throughout the country. In this section we focus on special educators' perceptions of problems related to *job design* — the *highly interrelated* set of structures, systems, and processes which support, or fail to support, accomplishment of major work objectives.

Job design essentially asks: Does the job, with all that it entails, make sense? Is it feasible? Is it one that a well-trained, interested, special education professional can manage and at the same time accomplish their major objective — enhancing students' academic, social and/or vocational competence? The unfortunate answer to these questions for a striking number of teachers is *no* — particularly those working in large urban school districts.

The following are major findings relating to job design and its effects on special education teachers:

- **Role conflict**. Changes in teachers work roles and responsibilities, due to increased emphasis on inclusion, have led a sizable of proportion of special educators to experience difficulties with **prioritization** of the many diverse responsibilities they are asked to perform. There was no sense that districts provide teachers with sensible criteria for prioritization of effort or relevant models to follow.

- **Role overload**. In all districts, many teachers feel overwhelmed and unable to manage the changes taking place in their work. Aspects of work which appeared particularly difficult across all studies for teachers to manage included the increasing size and complexity of their student caseloads (which some now consider unmanageable), growing expectations for collaboration with classroom teachers, and mounting paperwork responsibilities. These work challenges were further intensified by severe shortages of resources. Few teachers saw any relationship between paperwork and effective instruction.

- **Weakened Autonomy**. In many instances, teachers feel they can not use curricula they think — or research suggests — are best for their students, and/or instructional groupings that make sense for them. Beyond its day-to-day impact on their classroom, such lack of involvement represented for some teachers an implied lack of confidence in, and devaluing of, their professional opinions.

- **Issues Relating to School Culture and Collaboration with General Educators**. A number of special education teachers in the district experienced considerable difficulty in successfully implementing meaningful inclusion of their students, due partially to the attitudes and apparent lack of openness of some of the classroom teachers in their schools. Further, teachers feel that sufficient professional development and planning time with classroom teachers is not available, *primarily because existing work demands had not been modified or redistributed in any way.*

This combination of factors leads to high levels of stress, worsening feelings about the ability to teach effectively or assist students and, in some cases, lower commitment to the field. For example, in one of the districts, about half of the special education workforce experienced either daily or weekly stress stemming from job design issues such as caseload diversity (58%), challenging student behaviors (61%), and limited resources (41%). Chronic feelings of confusion, dissatisfaction and ineffectiveness often led teachers to thoughts about leaving and ultimately, attrition.

No easy solutions to these problems have emerged. Yet, we feel that there are at least three crucial means for improving working conditions related to job design:

1. Increase information flow from central offices to special education teachers at school sites, particularly as it relates to central office policies and rationale.

2. Provide more relevant professional development opportunities, especially those that promote substantive and ongoing collegial interaction between special educators. Many teachers hunger for more contact with colleagues, to share ideas and strategies, to observe successful models of inclusion or collaboration. For many, attending staff development sessions with general educators, while occasionally useful, is insufficient.

3. Provide more opportunities for meaningful shared decision-making particularly on issues that directly affect teachers' work.

Teachers' Perceptions of Working Conditions

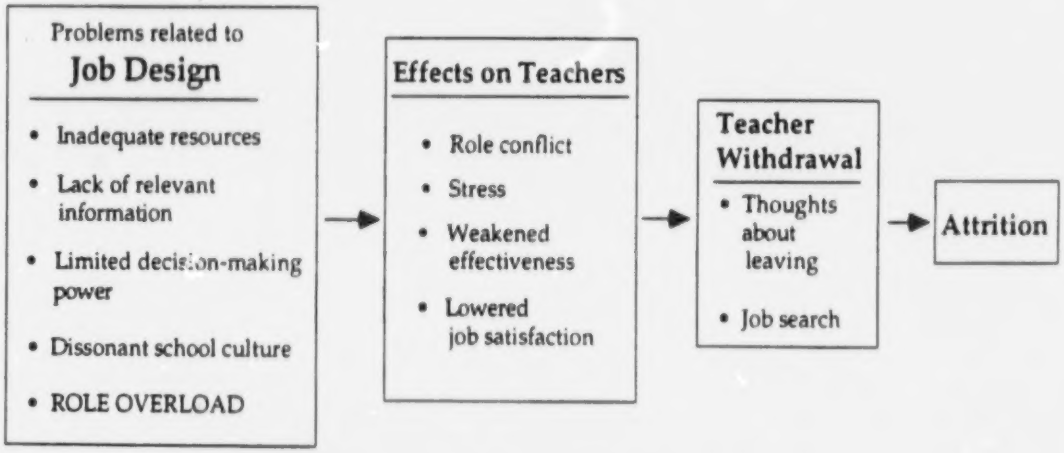
Section 1: Impact of Job Design on Stress, Commitment and Intent to Leave

Shifts in the delivery of special education services, especially the current movement to include all special education students in neighborhood schools regardless of disability, have produced marked changes in the roles and responsibilities of many special education teachers. These changes are accompanied by increased interest in better understanding factors affecting the working conditions and retention of special education teachers.

This summary report presents an integration of major findings on teachers' perceptions of their working conditions based on survey and interview data from special educators in six large urban districts located throughout the country. Data was collected from individuals who had left the field of special education, those intending to leave in the near future, and those who planned to continue in the field.

In this section we focus on special educators' perceptions of problems with working conditions related to Job Design (An accompanying report includes information on issues related to Support from the Central Office and Building Principal.) Job design can be viewed as the *highly interrelated* set of structures, systems, and processes which support, or fail to support, accomplishment of major work objectives. Figure 1 illustrates some aspects of job design and its effects on teachers.

Figure 1. Problems in Job Design Leading to Special Educators' Dissatisfaction and Attrition


Problems related to
Job Design
• Inadequate resources
• Lack of relevant information
• Limited decision-making power
• Dissonant school culture
• ROLE OVERLOAD
Effects on Teachers
• Role conflict
• Stress
• Weakened effectiveness
• Lowered job satisfaction
Teacher Withdrawal
• Thoughts about leaving
• Job search
Attrition

[Note: Composite model based on ERI and RTI conceptual frameworks]

Job design essentially asks: Does the job, with all that it entails, make sense? Is it feasible? Is it one that a well-trained, interested, special education professional can manage and at the same time accomplish their major objective — enhancing students' academic, social and/or vocational competence? The unfortunate answer to these questions for a striking number of teachers is *no* — particularly those working in large urban school districts.

Figure 2 illustrates some of the specific areas of dissatisfaction that stem from problems with job design.

Figure 2. Satisfaction Stemming From Job Design

How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your job?

	satisfied	**neutral**	**dissatisfied**
• instructional materials and supplies provided	21%	41%	38%
• school staff's attitude toward special education	43	20	37
• the quality of the support and encouragement you receive	51	17	32

Problems Related to Job Design Identified by Special Education Teachers

The following are major findings relating to these interrelated aspects of *job design* from analysis of data from the three research projects conducted by San Diego State University in conjunction with American Institute for Research, Research Triangle Institute, and Eugene Research Institute.

Role Overload

Many teachers expressed problems with role overload by indicating that they don't have enough time to do their work, that they need additional planning time or aides and clerical assistants to help them with their responsibilities. Over two thirds in one study also indicated that having "too much to do and to little time to do it" was causing frequent stress. In all districts, many teachers felt overwhelmed and unable to manage the changes taking place in their work.

Aspects of work which appeared particularly difficult across all studies for teachers to manage included the increasing complexity of their student caseloads, growing expectations for collaboration with classroom teachers, and mounting paperwork responsibilities. In some districts, a higher number of second language learners and/or students with severe emotional or behavioral disabilities further exacerbates tensions.

Caseload problems related to more than just numbers of students. The movement to non-categorical services, coupled with the gradual elimination of self-contained programs, resulted in a significant increase in the *diversity* of teachers' caseloads — age and grade ranges, number and specific exceptionality areas, ability levels, and the complexity and intensity of students' problems, all influence manageability. One resource teacher who was faced with an increasingly wide range of student needs in her class, reasonably raised the concern that she was not able to meet all of their needs:

> After we changed to cross-categorical, however, we [resource teachers] had students with severe disabilities with us half a day. And so I became more like a self-contained teacher. I had students with very severe disabilities half a day . . .– students who required a tremendous amount of my time and attention.
>
> I was not able to help those students with mild disabilities who could have been brought up to grade level . . . I wasn't able to do that, because my energies were going to working with these very severe students.
>
> I couldn't do any grouping whatsoever. There were . . .seven different grade levels, and two different languages. The way they are staffing the new model is doing a definite disservice to the students. The ratio . . . needs to be lower.

One teacher pinpointed the consequent drop in efficacy: "You start apologizing for what you knew you could do. You can't see any progress. And that's what you're there for."

Another teacher bluntly documented how poor job design leads to chronic stress and the decision to leave:

> I wasn't able to make adequate gains with students, and that was what made me really feel bad. I mean, I didn't feel like I was meeting the needs of the students the way I had been. I wasn't really [making the kind of progress with them] that I knew could be done.

Special education teachers' jobs have grown, over time, to involve much more than providing instruction to students. As expected, we found that the non-instructional parts of the job were definitely a source of stress for many of these teachers — with particular emphasis on growing paperwork demands.

Special educators cited paperwork as an issue more often than general educators. In one study, almost 25% of the special educators gave paperwork as a major reason for desiring to leave. In interviews, teachers cited the many different problematic aspects of paperwork, including having too much of it, too little time to complete it, and unnecessary (unimportant), redundant, and inconsistent requirements. They indicated that excessive paperwork interferes with teaching, their most important responsibility.

In another district, a full seventy percent of the teachers surveyed cited "bureaucratic requirements - rules, regulations, and paperwork", as a frequent source of stress in their work, and nearly all of those who actually left teaching raised concerns with escalating paperwork requirements.

These work challenges were further intensified by severe shortages of resources. In one district, staffing patterns and resources levels were perceived as inadequate for meeting the challenges presented by the district's efforts towards inclusion and contributing strongly to role overload. In another district, forty-one percent of teachers reported that "inadequate resources to do a good job" was a frequent source of stress.

Special educators indicated that the lack of instructional resources was one of their most pressing problems, and included inadequate materials, supplies, equipment, computers, and aides. Many indicated that they either had to provide the teaching materials themselves or to do without. In some districts, a lack of bilingual aides was cited as a serious resource deficit.

Lack of Autonomy

In some instances, teachers felt they could not use curricula that they think (or research suggests) are best for their students, and/or instructional groupings that make sense for them.

Interviews with teachers who left indicated that their perceived lack of involvement in key decisions that directly affected their work was a critical factor in their decisions to leave. One teacher spoke about her request for materials and equipment to support her instructional program. The first response from the central office was "no" due to lack of funds. Eventually they ordered some other curricula for her, but she felt what ultimately arrived addressed neither her original request nor her students' needs. It can not be overemphasized how impotent teachers feel when given little control over critical tools of their craft.

Teachers described their frustration at being separated from important decisions around curriculum selection and instructional philosophy in the district. For example, some teachers expressed favor for including some systematic instruction to build phonemic awareness, and had reservations about the whole-language method for teaching reading to students with disabilities — a method strongly endorsed by the district, with no empirical support. They were frustrated that the central office dictated a method of instruction, and particularly that they dictated it as a single approach for all students.

One teacher recalled her experience:

> [The district is] saying, "This is THE way you must teach now." I feel you have to know what's been used, what's available. And then, you have to draw the best from each of these programs and

> put them together to fit the child. Some children need phonics. Some children don't. I don't say you have to stand up there and teach everybody phonics. But some children need it. They should have the opportunity to learn those skills then.

A lack of involvement in decision making around student placements was another significant theme for a number of teachers. Teachers with longer tenure in the field remembered a time when they had been active members of the placement team and integrally involved in student placement decisions. In contrast, they reported that these decisions were now made at the district level by administrators and supervisors, and they often only learned about a new placement when the student arrived at the classroom door.

> It just seems like that special ed teachers have to follow rules that are dictated by . . . the administrators who are in a service center apart from the school. Maybe they are following a higher demand that's coming from somewhere, I don't know that.
>
> But I know that my word has no clout whatsoever. That I can be easily overridden by people in administrative positions, people who have *never* met the child.

Issues Relating to School Culture and Collaboration with General Educators

"Commitment to the new way of working together
has . . . to be tested under fire." (Hanna, 1988, p. 158)

A number of special education teachers in the district experienced considerable difficulty in successfully implementing meaningful inclusion of their students, due partially to the attitudes and apparent lack of openness of some of the classroom teachers in their schools. Many special educators question whether classroom teachers have the knowledge to work effectively with students with disabilities. In one study, only 2.9% agreed that classroom teachers had such capabilities. Further, half of the teachers disagreed with the statement that "the staff at this school have positive attitudes toward special education staff and students." Special educators were also less likely than general educators to indicate that they "felt included in what goes on in their schools," that they are "treated with respect" by their colleagues or that they "exchanged professional ideas with their colleagues."

Several of the teachers interviewed expressed concerns about the receptivity of classroom teachers' to special educators working in the classroom. One teacher described her experience as "walking on eggshells."

> Three fourths of the teachers don't want you in their room. Whether it's insecurity, whether it's the fact that they are the teacher, possessiveness, this is their room, whatever the reason. Three fourths of them do not want another person coming in to their room. They're very explicit about it.

Other times, teachers raised concerns about the possibility of inclusion, because of some classroom teachers' assumptions about students with special needs.

> There are some classroom teachers who are not able to change their expectations for different children. They're inflexible. For example, say I have a student who's in 6th grade, reading at the 3rd grade level . . . But then they go back to their classroom for

> social studies, and they're told to read chapter so-and-so and answer the questions . . . they get a failing grade in social studies because they can't do that. It's not fair.

She reasonably concluded:

> You could work with some of the teachers but not all of the teachers. Not all teachers are able to understand the person who cannot do everything the way they think they should. They have no patience or tolerance for that child. And that's your special education child.

Many teachers also feel that sufficient planning time is not available, *primarily because existing work demands had not been modified or redistributed in any way.* As one teacher put it: "To collaborate with the teacher -- to get carryover -- you need time with the teacher. And there isn't that time. It's not built in. *Your caseload hasn't gone down; you still have to service the same number of kids.*" The result was that teachers had to try to squeeze the time for this central activity into an already packed day:

> Virtually the only time I could meet with teachers was lunch. I don't know if you know what teachers are like at lunch? There's barely time to go to the bathroom and eat your lunch and get your wits together and make essential phone calls. There's no way you can really effectively interface with teachers at lunch. So, it was almost impossible for me to find enough time to spend with one teacher, let alone all of them.

These special educators' comments point to the importance of laying the groundwork necessary to ensure innovations can have a chance to succeed. Clearly, professional development plays an important role. Attention must also be given to basic logistics surrounding increased instructional interdependence between special and general educators.

Role Conflict

Role conflict is quite high for many teachers. Survey findings suggest that recent changes in teachers work roles and responsibilities, due to increased parent advocacy and increased emphasis on inclusion, have left many teachers feeling confused about what is expected of them in their jobs — confusion due largely to perceived limited information flow. Almost one third reported that conflicting expectations, goals, and directives were a frequent source of stress. One in four felt that their specific responsibility for integrating students had also not been clearly spelled out.

These changes in teachers' work roles and responsibilities, due to increased emphasis on inclusion, have led a sizable of proportion of special educators to experience difficulties with **prioritization** of the many diverse responsibilities they are asked to perform. There was no sense that districts provide teachers with sensible criteria for prioritization of effort or relevant models to follow.

Teachers often felt the way the work was organized actually set up competing priorities. For example, many teachers felt that attention to paperwork could only be given at the expense of instructional time. One teacher asked rhetorically: "Do you want me to [teach], or do you want me just to spend all my time writing about it?" Two others echoed her concern:

> You spend one day a week as an elementary special ed teacher handling paper. You don't teach. You handle paperwork and you test; you write IEPs; you have meetings. I think they could probably train educational assistants to do a lot of it
>
> I work with children. And I said, heck with the paperwork. I'd rather do activities in the classroom, or work with small groups, or even work with discipline problems or whatever. But I didn't like filling out all the umpteen [forms]. I wanted to spend my time with the children, with students—versus doing paperwork.

Some teachers felt that many of these non-instructional tasks were irrelevant to their instructional work, neither serving their original purpose nor used by their intended audiences. In fact, one former special education teacher noted that, while paperwork was somewhat more extensive in her new position as Title I specialist, she did not resent it as much because it was more directly tied to her daily lessons with students.

Others described feeling frustrated or even insulted that their education and training were being squandered on tasks so clerical in nature. These teachers felt the clerical elements should be delegated to clerical support staff, or the entire task should be streamlined or computerized:

> I was working 60 hours a week and at least probably 45 hours of that was just blasted paperwork and assessment in class of the kids and all the stuff that went with that. And it just got to be too much. I mean, I was trained to teach — not to be a secretary. And so, that's why I got out of it. Pure and simple

In both the survey and interview studies, teachers consistently reported feeling that they were not able to conduct their work in ways that were consistent with their professional beliefs and goals. In most cases, the issues for these teachers did not reflect ideology or preparation. In fact, up to 90% of the teachers surveyed felt prepared to deal with many critical aspects of their work, including managing student behavior and responding to the diversity and severity of their students needs. The difficulties these teachers were experiencing related more accurately to a perception that their jobs had not been sufficiently redesigned to render changes in job responsibilities feasible. As one teacher put it:

> "The idea [behind inclusion] . . . is good. But when you begin to work it out, there are . . . many complications. In order for it to *work*, there has to be more time or more teachers."

Directions for Addressing Chronic Problems in Job Design

This combination of factors leads to high levels of stress, worsening feelings about the ability to effectively teach or assist their students and, in some cases, lower commitment to the field. Chronic feelings of confusion, dissatisfaction and ineffectiveness often led teachers to thoughts about leaving and ultimately, attrition.

No easy solutions to these problems have emerged. Clearly, it is not enough to simply speed up old processes when work requirements change. Often what is needed is a re-evaluation of the assumptions and rules that underlie operations and a re-engineering of work processes to accommodate shifting work demands.

We feel that there are at least three crucial means for improving working conditions related to job design.

1. Increasing Information Flow. Flow of relevant information from central offices to special education teachers at school sites is minimal, except on issues related to paperwork. Teachers virtually never feel that the district provides rationales for policies and decisions.

According to Hanna (1988), in productive organizations, information systems are designed "to provide information to *the point of action and problem solving.*" Many teachers reported concerns that information was not being shared or funneled down to their level and, as a result, felt deep confusion about what was expected of them.

Several veteran teachers described how information sharing deteriorated as the district grew larger and more bureaucratic. Their testimonies are consistent with research on the evolution of organizations, which posits that as organizations grow and mature, knowledge and information tend to become more centralized. One teacher echoed the voice of several in her discussion of this shift.

> One of the problems is that none of us really know what the guidelines are any more. I don't know what qualifies anybody any more.
>
> I got to the point where I didn't even know what they were working with to make their decisions. I mean, I used to --and now I don't know what the district's guidelines are for placement, what they are for category, what the different programs mean.
>
> In the past, the teachers always had hands-on, and we were highly knowledgeable --in fact, we'd have in-services, they'd want the teachers to stay current and knowledgeable. But in recent years it got to the point where I couldn't even keep track of who qualified for what.

2. Providing more relevant professional development opportunities for special educators and classroom teachers to interact in substantive ways. Many hunger for more contact with colleagues, to share ideas and strategies, to observe successful models of inclusion or collaboration. The districts fail to facilitate such interactions. Some of the veterans report that these opportunities did exist in years past. Few blame individual administrators, they realize they are reacting to a range of outside forces and budget cuts, but still they need information.

These findings indicate that an appreciable proportion of special education teachers feel isolated and attempts to collaborate with other teachers at schools are likely to be extremely difficult. They also point to the fact that school buildings vary greatly in the extent to which they support special education.

Over half of the teachers surveyed reported experiencing only minimal conflict when it came to spending time working directly with students versus with their classroom teachers — an indication that many teachers are managing to adapt to their new work roles with little turmoil. Still, a core group, 25%, indicated that working with classroom teachers was a frequent source of conflict in their work as it infringed on their time with students. Structures that support substantive collegial networks are a crucial need identified by teachers. And of course, models of how to prioritize and how to find the time to create relationships with general educators is crucial. This includes district guidelines helping to address which activities are low priority.

One teacher's comments tied the idea of successful collaboration and productive teacher relations back into job design. She stated that:

> The special education teacher that goes in and out of the classroom, needs to have a special rapport [with the classroom teacher], but the time to build that is, very often, not there.

Clearly, there is the greatest chance of successful collaboration when there is an awareness of the intricate, two-way relationship between cultural outcomes and the larger job design.

Strategies for successful collaboration and inclusion are one of the most critical areas where support and professional development is needed. Locally-developed models of productive practice should provide useful directions for others. However, for these subtle issues, business-as-usual "inservice training" is insufficient.

3. Meaningful shared decision making. There is an old adage: information is power. For many teachers, the two go hand-in-hand. For example, in describing her lack of current knowledge of eligibility criteria in the district, one teacher remarked: "It is like some big secret. [Only the central office] will tell you whether a kid qualifies or not!"

Interviews with teachers who left the field indicated that their perceived lack of involvement in key decisions that directly affected their work was a critical factor in their decisions to leave. The perceptions of a number of these leavers were reflected in the comments of one when she placed teachers squarely at the bottom of the decision-making hierarchy: "This whole district is too big . . . they hand their directives down to people, who hand them down to other people, who hand them down."

Beyond its day-to-day impact on their classroom, such lack of involvement represented for some teachers an implied lack of confidence in, and devaluing of, their professional opinions. In several districts, strategic action planning efforts are rightly beginning to address these issues, looking for more ways to meaningfully involve teachers in decisions that affect their work.

WORKING PAPER # 5

Working Conditions: Administrator Support

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May 25-26, 1995

Teachers' Perceptions of Administrative Support
Section 2: Impact of Administrative Support on Job Satisfaction, Commitment, and Intent to Leave

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This summary report presents an integration of major findings on teachers' perceptions of working conditions based on survey and interview data from special educators in six large urban districts located throughout the country. In this section we focus on special educators' perceptions of administrative support at two levels: building and central office.

Administrative support is a multidimensional concept, involving a variety of attitudes and actions. The importance of positive working relationships between teachers and their administrators cannot be overemphasized. In each of the districts, teacher satisfaction, commitment, and intent to leave were all highly associated with administrative support.

Interestingly, however, building support and central office support were not often highly correlated with each other, suggesting that teachers view these two sources of support in distinct ways.

The following is a brief summary of major findings relating to teachers' perceptions of building and central office support.

Building Support

In discussing the influence that building administrators can have, one teacher stated it simply:

> "The principal really does make a difference. I've worked with a lot of different ones, and it matters. The personal philosophy of a site administrator can make such a difference in how a teacher will either blossom and create, or feel stifled and subjugated."

For special education teachers, issues related to the principal are key to understanding perceived satisfaction and commitment to special education teaching. Problems related frequently to:

- lack of understanding of what teachers do in their classrooms;
- failure to recognize the significance of teachers' work challenges and accomplishments;
- limited assistance with specific problems, such as discipline or integration efforts;
- reluctance to involve teachers in determining the shape of the school's special education programs.

Many teachers reported positive and supportive relationships with their building principals. However, the need for continued effort in this area is supported by the fact that sizable numbers of teachers in all districts still reported concerns.

For instance, despite emphasis on inclusive education, many teachers reported that they do not yet feel included in what goes on in their schools, and that they receive limited assistance from building principals with their efforts to integrate students.

These findings indicate that an appreciable proportion of special education teachers feel isolated, and attempts to collaborate with other teachers in the school are likely to be extremely difficult. They also point to the fact that school buildings vary greatly in the extent to which they support inclusive special education.

Central Office Support

Positive perceptions of central office support may depend on whether central offices effectively communicate and model directions for special education that make sense to teachers and that incorporate teachers' core values and priorities — namely planning for and providing instruction to students.

In most cases, teachers formed perceptions about administrative priorities, not based on direct discussion with administrators, *but rather on their interpretations of administrative decisions and/or actions taken over time*. For example, when administrators focus heavily on meeting paperwork goals, while offering little recognition to teachers for their successes with students, teachers often interpret this to mean that administrators prioritize or value legal compliance over making meaningful strides with students.

The potential for misunderstanding between teachers and central offices is exacerbated by infrequent contact. Many teachers believed that judgments or decisions were being made about their work that were not adequately informed. This sense of being managed from a distance left many teachers feeling misunderstood, undervalued, and powerless to effect change. As one teacher put it:

> "Special education teachers' hands are tied, they can do nothing, because they have to answer to people who never see the children . . . and yet make significant decisions for them."

Central office-teacher relations would benefit from increased communication regarding central office and teacher values, priorities, district policy and rationale. Teachers' concerns express an urgent need for districts to expand opportunities for meaningful exchange of ideas and relevant information. As one teacher who left poignantly concluded:

> "I always knew that if I asked for something that was going to cost money, I might get it and I might not. *But for people to feel that what I was doing was worthwhile is really what I would have wanted.*"

Teachers' Perceptions of Working Conditions

Section 2: Impact of Administrative Support on Job Satisfaction, Commitment, and Intent to Leave

This summary addresses special educators' perceptions of central office and building level support and the relationship of support to teacher job satisfaction, commitment, and retention. We present an integration of major findings on teachers' perceptions of administrative support based on interview and survey data from special educators in several large urban districts. The studies involved teachers who left special education teaching, those who intend to leave in the future, and those who plan to remain.

Administrative support is a multidimensional concept that involves a variety of attitudes and activities. **A key aspect of administrative support is treating teachers like knowledgeable professionals.** This involves treating teachers as professionals by giving them input into decisions, communicating confidence and respect in them, and demonstrating interest in teachers and their students. **Another important aspect of support is effective communication.** Helpful administrators demonstrate and communicate knowledge about special education and other policies, are accessible to teachers, and help clarify teacher roles and responsibilities. **Finally, supportive administrators provide assistance to teachers by helping them with their needs (e.g., obtaining resources, providing staff development opportunities, giving feedback, and dealing with discipline problems).** This combination of administrator attitude and activities appears to be important to good teacher-administrator relationships.

Teachers may interact with more than one administrator on a regular basis. Special educators work not only with their principals, but also with central office administrators regarding many aspects of their work (e.g., placement of students, regulatory requirements, I.E.P.s). See appendices A and B for a comparison of teachers' ratings of principals and central office administrators in two different districts.

The Relationship of Administrative Support to Job Satisfaction, Commitment, and Attrition

Both principals and central office administrators are in positions to influence how teachers feel about their work. We found that teacher satisfaction, commitment, and attrition were associated with administrative support. For example, intent to stay in teaching was higher among general and special educators who reported higher levels of administrative support than those who reported less support. The lack of administrative support was also a frequently cited source of attrition among special educators. Approximately 25% of special educators who left one school district indicated that the lack of administrative support was an important contributor to their decisions to leave. This finding held across three years.

Administrative support is also positively correlated with teacher commitment to the district. In one school district, the correlation between commitment and principal support was .39. The correlation between commitment and central office support was even higher (.43). Administrators also influence teachers' job satisfaction. Issues related to the principal was key to understanding teachers' perceived satisfaction.

When the administrator-teacher relationship is a significant problem, it is likely that the teacher will consider transferring to another school or district. Desiring a better or more supportive administrator was one of the most frequently mentioned reasons for desiring a transfer to another school. In one district, insufficient central office support was cited as a major reason for leaving the field of special education by almost all of the teacher leavers interviewed.

Specific Problems Related to Administrative Support

Administrators influence many different aspects of teachers' lives. Therefore, it is not surprising that our teacher interviews and surveys revealed a wide range of problems. Some frequently mentioned problems related to:

- the lack of respect/concern shown to teachers by administrators
- the lack of communication between administrators and teachers

- the lack of accessibility to the administrator
- disagreements about student placement
- the lack of assistance with discipline
- the lack of knowledge about special education and/or failure to communicate important knowledge
- administrators' concern with regulations versus programs/children
- dissimilar values between teachers and administrators
- the lack of input into decisions which influence teachers' work
- the lack of recognition for teachers' efforts and innovations
- the lack of support for specific problems (e.g., parent concerns, getting materials)

It is important to emphasize that the problems teachers reported were complex and often related to more than a single "administrative support" issue. For example, disagreement regarding the placement of a student might be related to the lack of input into the decision, the teachers' perception that the administrator did not value her input, and disagreement with the district's placement policies. The following illustrates some of the problems teachers reported with both principals and central office personnel.

The interviews exposed several problematic patterns of interaction between teachers and administrators, including frequency and purpose of contact, and the effects of these patterns on teachers' work experiences. Many teachers reported that they had little to no contact with central office administrators. Lack of contact was problematic for teachers because they perceived that the central office held considerable decision-making power over issues that directly affected their work. Teachers believed that decisions being made about their work were not adequately informed due to low levels of administrative contact. This sense of being managed from a distance left many teachers feeling misunderstood, undervalued, and powerless to effect change. As one teacher put it, "the special education teachers' hands are tied, they can do nothing, because they have to answer to people that never see children all day long and yet make significant decisions for them."

Some teachers reported feeling that they were not valued, that there was an apparent lack of regard for their opinions, and that they were not treated as professional equals. And as one teacher put it, the important thing was not always in getting the resources, but rather in feeling that someone was out there advocating for her needs.

Principals are generally more accessible to teachers than central office personnel. The importance of the role of the building administrators was evident across the entire special education faculty of two districts. In one district, special educators were asked to identify their top three sources of work-related satisfaction, as well as the top three things they wished to change about their jobs. Relationships with site-level administrations frequently showed up as a response to either one of the other of these questions, reflecting the variation in experiences across these teachers. Similarly in another district, the entire population of special education teachers were asked what made them want to stay or leave their present positions. Again, principals (as well as central office supervisors) were given both as reasons for staying and leaving.

Some teachers expressed an expectation that their principal have a basic understanding of what they do in their classrooms. However, principals may not understand special education programs as well as other school programs and may have only minimal training in special education. Consequently, some principals may be less effective in assisting special educators than general educators. For example, in one district general educators were significantly more likely than special educators to agree to the following statements about their principals: (a) provides current information about teaching/learning; (b) informs me about school/district policies; (c) explains reasons behind programs and practices; (d) understands my program and what I do; (e) provides leadership about what we are trying to achieve; and (f) interacts with me frequently.

Some teachers talked about the lack of interest and assistance that the principal provided to them:

> The principal was very reluctant to give me anything and seemed to be reluctant to treat me as a staff member. Her teachers were allotted certain materials and I was not. Usually it ended up that the secretary would say, "here, have a stapler." or "here's a pen." Practically the first thing out of her mouth was: "Well, whose budget are you on."

A number of teachers indicated that principals did not support them with difficult students. One teacher stated:

> It seemed the principal did not have time to be bothered about what I called severe classroom problems, such as bringing weapons to school, students hitting teachers, and other

> students. The discipline was not consistent, nor was any discipline carried out.

However, some teachers made the point that their administrators had a positive influence in their work. The following teacher noted some problems like the others, but cited the principal as key to an improvement in her situation:

> My last two years of teaching were far better than the first 7 years. The problems at the central office, state irregularities/changes in the middle of the year, and needless paper shuffles were the same at both assignments. The difference was the learning environment and the supportive administration. The most recent school had a strong academic reputation and administrators who worked for the kids. These two factors set high expectations for me the teacher as well as for the students. My classroom was a exciting place.

The opportunity to discuss work, in an open and collaborative environment, contributed to an unprecedented growth period in this teacher's career:

> I had a period of growth at this school with my current principal that I just will treasure forever because of the way that (my principal) administrates the school. She tells us what her philosophies are and what methods of teaching she thinks are the best. She gives us copies of different research and things to let us know where she is. But she doesn't push to change. She sends out little fish hooks, and if we bite, she reels us in and sends us all the places we need to go to grow in those particular areas.
>
> She was concerned about the curriculum, she was concerned about educating the kids. She didn't care whether my chalk ledger was dirty or not or whether I had bulletin boards changed every couple of weeks.

Summary and Recommendations

An important factor in understanding job satisfaction, commitment, and attrition is the extent to which teachers feel supported by their principals and central office administrators. Teachers look to administrators as sources of support and information. Administrators need to understand how to support teachers and research about administrative support needs to be included in their training. However, it is important to note that there are not exact formulas for providing support, because support needs vary depending upon the context of the situation. Building principals and central office administrators need to periodically assess teachers' needs for support. Asking teachers to identify areas in which they need assistance and listening to teachers' concerns as they arise are important first steps. Administrators who are accessible, listen, and try to understand teachers' perspectives will likely be viewed as supportive. Further, involving teachers in decisions in areas that influence their work lives should help administrator-teacher relationships. Teachers also need to have a better understanding of some of the problems administrators must deal with and what they can realistically expect in terms of support and assistance. Teachers need to understand that administrators have many agendas and many administrators likely experience problems such as role overload themselves.

Appendix A-1
Teacher Perceptions of Central Office Supervisors' Support

My Central Office Supervisor:	Responses	Agree %	Tend to Agree %	Tend to Disagree %	Disagree %	Mean	SD
Has my respect and trust	373	61.1	26.0	8.6	4.3	3.4	0.8
Interacts with me frequently	376	29.0	34.0	20.5	16.5	2.8	1.0
Attends to my feelings and needs	377	36.1	37.1	15.6	11.1	3.0	1.0
Recognizes and appreciates the work I do	375	48.5	35.7	8.5	7.2	3.3	0.9
Provides current information about teaching/ learning	377	39.0	33.2	15.4	12.5	3.0	1.0
Provides helpful feedback about my teaching	375	37.6	36.0	12.8	13.6	3.0	1.0
Informs me about school/district policies	374	43.6	37.2	11.8	7.5	3.2	0.9
Supports my actions and ideas	373	41.8	39.7	10.7	7.8	3.2	0.9
Explains reasons behind programs and practices	375	42.7	34.4	12.8	10.1	3.1	1.0
Allows me input into decisions that affect me	373	33.5	36.2	18.2	12.1	2.9	1.0
Helps me solve problems	377	37.9	33.4	19.4	9.3	3.0	1.0
Supports me in my interactions with parents	370	46.2	36.8	10.0	7.0	3.2*	0.9
Understands my program and what I do	377	65.3	25.2	5.0	4.5	3.5	0.8
Provides leadership about what we are trying to achieve	375	48.8	29.3	14.4	7.5	3.2*	0.9
Overall score	378					3.1*	0.8

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Appendix A-2
Teacher Perceptions of Support from Site Principals

My Principal:	Responses	Agree %	Tend to Agree %	Tend to Disagree %	Disagree %	Mean	SD
Has my respect and trust	442	55.7	28.3	10.0	6.1	3.3	0.9
Interacts with me frequently	445	44.3	33.0	17.5	5.2	3.2	0.9
Attends to my feelings and needs	443	33.4	39.5	15.8	11.3	3.0	1.0
Recognizes and appreciate the work I do	442	42.1	37.8	12.0	8.1	3.1	0.9
Provides current information about teaching/ learning	442	32.6	36.0	19.7	11.8	2.9*	1.0
Provides helpful feedback about my teaching	440	30.9	39.1	17.7	12.3	2.9	1.0
Informs me about school/district policies	436	43.3	37.2	13.1	6.4	3.2*	0.9
Supports my actions and ideas	440	43.0	38.6	11.4	7.0	3.2	0.9
Explains reasons behind programs and practices	442	34.8	39.1	17.2	8.8	3.0*	0.9
Allows me input into decisions that affect me	439	38.0	33.0	18.9	10.0	3.0	1.0
Helps me solve problems	442	37.3	36.9	16.5	9.3	3.0	1.0
Supports me in my interactions with parents	440	51.4	38.9	5.9	3.9	3.4	0.8
Understands my program and what I do	445	37.8	36.7	16.9	9.7	3.0*	1.0
Provides leadership about what we are trying to achieve	443	38.1	35.4	16.5	9.9	3.0*	1.0
Overall score	445					3.1	0.8

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Appendix B.1

Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Principal Support In Silver City Unified

Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
60	15	25	My principal (or vice principal) works with me to solve problems.
57	18	25	My principal (or vice principal) actively assists my efforts to integrate students.
62	10	28	I can count on my principal to provide appropriate assistance when a student's behavior requires it.
53	16	31	I feel included in what goes on in this school.
Very Much	**Somewhat**	**Very Little**	
34	41	25	How helpful is the feedback your receive from your principal or vice principal?
45	32	23	To what extent does your building principal understand what you do?
Satisfied	**Neutral**	**Dissatisfied**	
51	10	39	Satisfaction with quality of support and encouragement you receive.
			Frequency
Daily/ Often	**Sometimes**	**Seldom/ Never**	
50	28	22	How often principal recognizes the good teaching you do.
50	26	24	How often do you receive encouragement to try out new ideas?

Appendix B.2

Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Central Office Support in Silver City Unified

Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
52	18	30	A contact person from special education works with me to solve problems.
45	31	24	The special education division backs me up when I need it.
Very Much	**Somewhat**	**Very Little**	
27	41	32	How helpful is the feedback you receive from your special education contact?
30	38	32	To what extent do you feel the district special education department understands what you do in your job?
			Frequency
Almost Never/ Several Xs/Yr	**Once / Month**	**Weekly/ Daily**	
64	16	20	Frequency of stress due to lack of support from special education administration.
At Least Once a /Mo.	**Several Xs/Year**	**Once /Year or Less**	
27	27	46	How often do you receive feedback from your special education contact?

WORKING PAPER # 6

Impact of Job Design Problems and Lack of Support

Prepared by

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NATIONAL DISSEMINATION FORUM
Special Education Teacher Satisfaction, Retention, and Attrition

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DRAFT VERSION May 17, 1995

Understanding the Relationship Between Job Design Problems, Support, and Attrition/Retention of Special Educators:
Findings From a Path Analysis

Russell Gersten, Thomas Keating, Paul Yovanoff
Eugene Research Institute

May 12, 1995
DRAFT VERSION

FACT SHEET

Understanding the Relationship Between Job Design Problems, Support, and Attrition/Retention of Special Educators:
Findings From a Path Analysis

The following are some implications of the path analysis procedures that were used to interpret retention survey data. These statistical procedures allow for identification of important relationships among aspects of job design, support, appraisals of stress, commitment to the field of special education, and intent to leave.

Path analyses were performed on data from samples of special educators from three very different urban districts in the West. The analysis looked at a broad range of factors that could affect plans to leave the field.

An important overall point emerging from the analysis is that for this path model, *the same fundamental relationships among variables hold in three different cities..*

Because of the complexity of the overall path model, portions of the model and related findings are presented in excerpted fashion below. The path coefficients presented in the diagrams are drawn from the largest of the three districts and were chosen for their representativeness of findings. They are, in virtually all cases, closely replicated in the other two districts.

FINDINGS

1. *Principal support* is critical to all essential aspects of job satisfaction. This support encompasses:

   a. a principal who assists in problem solving
   b. feeling backed up by the principal in both integration of special ed students and discipline issues
   c. feeling understood by the principal
   d. feeling included in what goes on in the school.

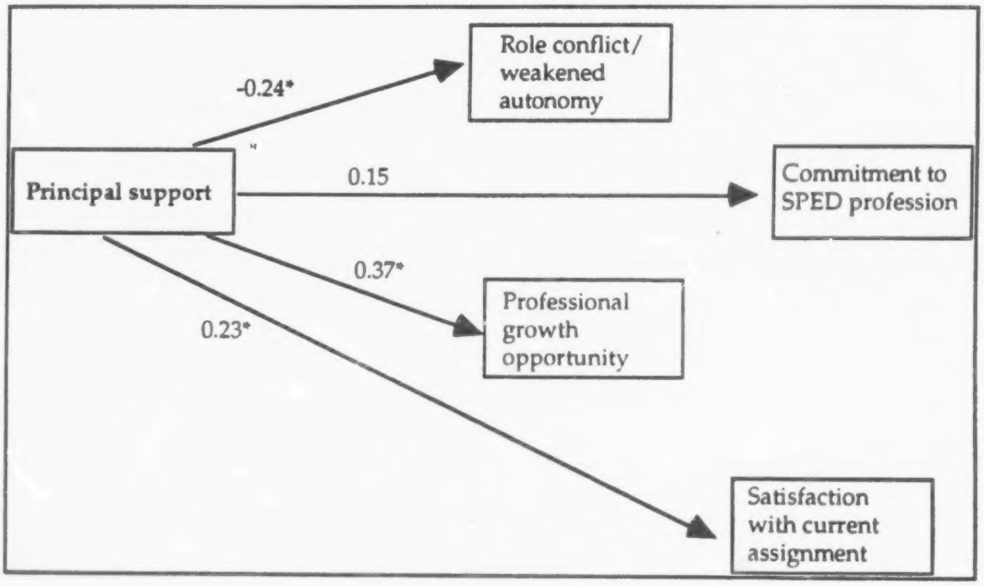
Perceptions by teachers of high levels of principal support (see Figure 1) are associated with :

- *stronger commitment* to the field of special education

- a sense of greater professional development opportunities to learn new things on the job
- stronger feelings of professional trust and autonomy
- a belief that there is an integration of various job components and that these components are congruent with teachers' personal philosophies.

Through its impact on the four areas identified in Figure 1, principal support *lowers* the likelihood that a special educator would plan on leaving.

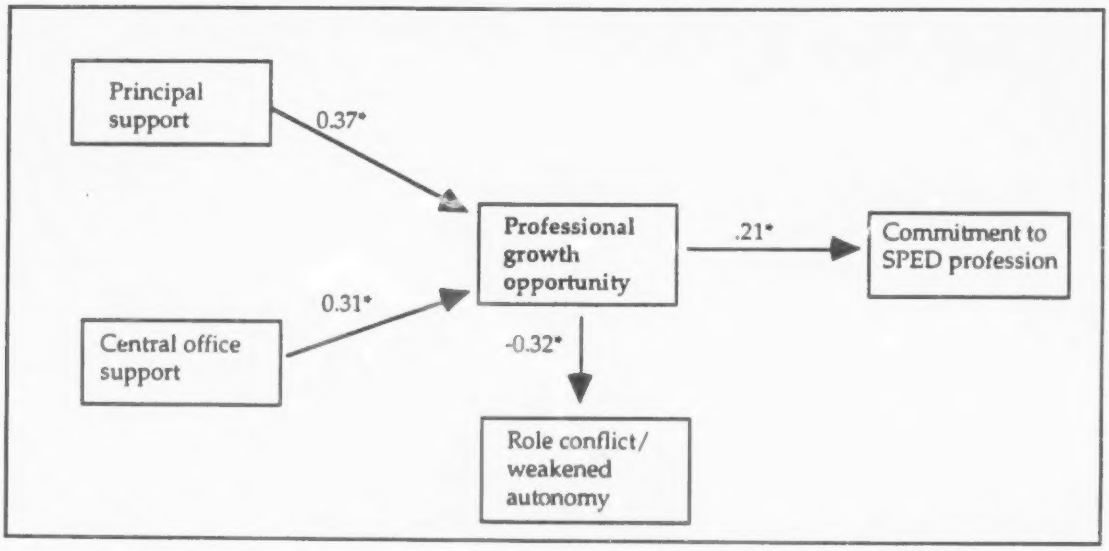
Figure 1. The Impact of Principal Support


Role conflict/ weakened autonomy
-0.24*
Principal support
0.15
Commitment to SPED profession
0.37*
Professional growth opportunity
0.23*
Satisfaction with current assignment

2. Perceived *opportunities for professional growth* are influenced by both central administration and building principal. This, too, is a critical factor in understanding individuals' commitment to the field. This construct encompasses satisfaction with opportunities for leaving and growth on the job.

When special educators feel they are provided with growth opportunities, they experience less conflict and confusion about their role and feel more autonomy. By and large, lack of growth opportunities constitutes a major source of dissatisfaction.

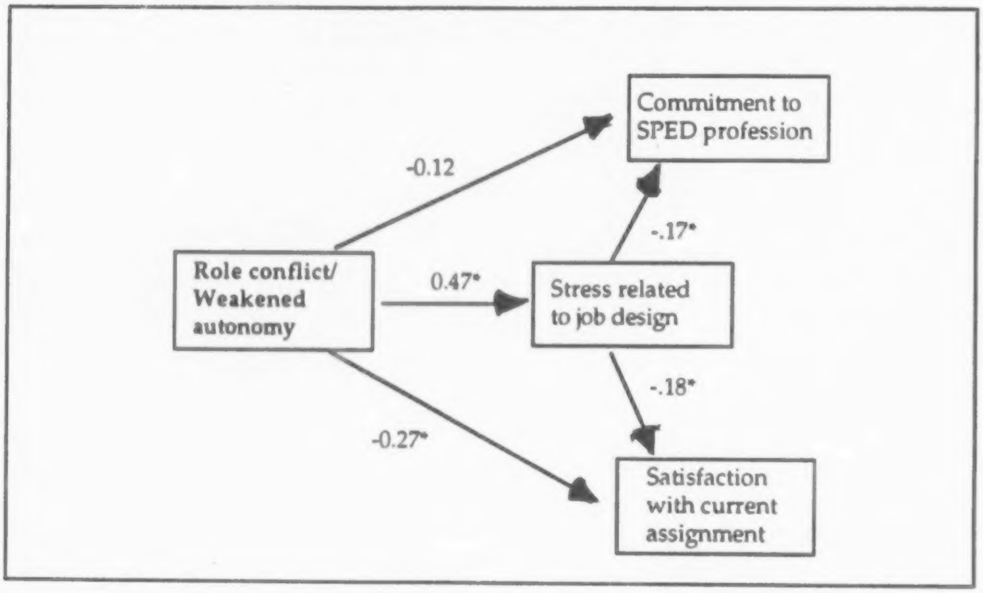
Figure 2 . Role of Opportunities for Professional Growth


Principal support
0.37*
Professional growth opportunity
.21*
Commitment to SPED profession
0.31*
Central office support
-0.32*
Role conflict/ weakened autonomy

3. *Role conflict/Weakened autonomy* (see Figure 3) is strongly related to stress and to satisfaction with current assignment. As expected, chronic stress lowers commitment to the field and satisfaction with current assignment to similar degrees.

One of the benefits of a path analysis diagram is that it facilitates the examination of *indirect* relationships among variables in addition to direct effects. An example of this may be seen in Figure 4, where the direct relationship between role problems and commitment to the field is limited. However, a stronger indirect effect of role problems on commitment is apparent, acting through its effect on stress and, in turn, the inverse effect of stress on commitment.

Figure 3. Impact of Role Conflict/ Autonomy Problems

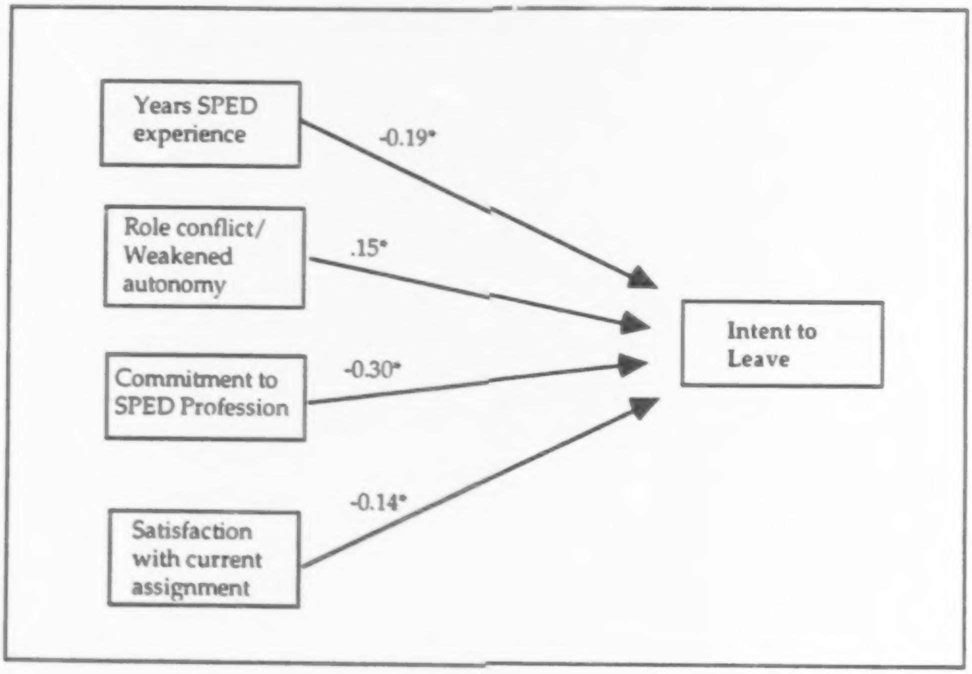

Commitment to SPED profession
-0.12
-.17*
Role conflict/ Weakened autonomy
0.47*
Stress related to job design
-.18*
-0.27*
Satisfaction with current assignment

4. Not surprisingly, *intent to leave* the field of special education (see Figure 4) is strongly influenced by commitment to the field and special education experience. It is also affected to a lesser extent by satisfaction with current position and experience of role conflict.

- Less experienced teachers are somewhat *more* likely to leave.
- As one might expect, those with low commitment to the field or low satisfaction with current position are more likely to leave, as are those who experience greater role conflict.

It is important to reiterate that the path model consists of multiple highly interrelated variables, and that the "direct" effects on intent to leave in Figure 4 are, with the exception of experience, all influenced by the other variables in the model with which they share relationships.

Figure 4. Relationship of Experience, Committment, Role Conflict and Satisfaction, with Intent to Leave


Years SPED experience
-0.19*
Role conflict/ Weakened autonomy
.15*
Commitment to SPED Profession
-0.30*
Satisfaction with current assignment
-0.14*
Intent to Leave

Technical Notes

Only special education teachers age 55 and younger were included in the analysis, since we were most interested in what would cause individuals to leave the field earlier than typical retirement age. District sample sizes ranged from 169 to 243 special education teachers.

The theoretical framework guiding the analysis was influenced by the earlier work of Lawrence Cross and Bonnie Billingsley on special education attrition and the research of Susan Rosenholtz and Milbrey Wallis McLaughlin on workplace factors that enhance the quality of teachers' professional work.

The high level of replicability across samples increases confidence that the model may have external validity for special educators beyond those surveyed in this project. It is important to note however, given the relatively limited extant work in this area and the nature of causal modeling techniques, that other equally valid models may be constructed from the same data set. Hence these findings should be viewed as part of an evolving understanding of working conditions for special education teachers.

WORKING PAPER # 7

Personnel Preparation: Relationship to Job Satisfaction

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TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR LEVELS OF PREPARATION: RELATIONSHIP TO JOB SATISFACTION

This paper reports on findings from the three studies that have implications for the preservice and inservice personnel preparation of special education teachers, for general education teachers relative to their evolving roles in providing instruction to special education students, and to site principals and other administrators who so strongly influence the delivery of educational services to students with disabilities. The SDSU/AIR project specifically probed respondent perceptions of their own preservice preparation in both general and special education. Both the SDSU/AIR and ERI projects asked specific questions relative to respondent ratings of their current levels of preparation to perform various components of their jobs. All three projects probed respondent perceptions of administrator support, acceptance by and or relationships with general education teachers, other special educators, parents, and teachers.

Preparation of Special Education Teachers

In the SDSU/AIR study, the current teachers were given several opportunities to rate their level of preparation for the special education teaching positions that they currently held. Charts and tables are attached that reflect teacher ratings relative to their preparation across specific job components and credential programs. These data are summarized below:

- The four skill areas in which the teachers rated themselves the least well-prepared at the current time included (beginning with the area receiving the lowest preparation rating): responding to linguistic diversity, interfacing with the core curriculum, dealing with severe behavior disorders, and collaborating with/consulting with general education teachers.

- Relative to current levels of preparation, current and former special education teachers felt ill-prepared to work with general education teachers, manage disruptive behaviors, and work effectively with consultants.

- Teachers who were fully credentialed rated their professional skills more highly than did teachers who were not yet fully credentialed.

- Generally, teachers who had left or were strongly considering leaving special education teaching tended to agree with the move toward increased consultation roles for special educators, but felt unprepared to perform effectively as consultants. They tended to both disagree with, and rate themselves as poorly prepared to implement, district policies toward greater mainstreaming/inclusion of students with severe handicaps, sensory impairments, and serious emotional disturbances. Retirees were particularly unaccepting of policies and practices relating to the mainstreaming/inclusion of these students.

- Overall, the skill areas in which special education teachers tend to feel the least well-prepared are those typically associated with operating effective inclusion/mainstreaming programs.

- Overall, the skills about which special education teachers reported feeling the most confident are those that are closely aligned to the operation of traditional special education programs (providing effective instruction, organizing classroom environments, and implementing special education curriculum), not those expected of educators serving in consultant or co-teaching roles.

- The special education teachers rated the quality of their preservice preparation as quite low relative to those skills that support working with special education students in the mainstream.

- The focus of pre-service special education preparation appears to be shifting. Teachers who completed their pre-service preparation 1 - 5 years prior to the study gave higher ratings to the preparation they received in several key areas than did teachers who completed their pre-service preparation programs 10 or more years prior to the study. Among the pre-service preparation areas rated more highly by newly minted special education teachers as opposed to more experienced teachers were working with general education teachers; serving as, and working with. consultants; and working with parents.

- The California special education teachers, for whom general education credentials were pre-requisites to special education credential, rated the quality of their special education preparation higher for all skills identified. The skills for which there were the highest discrepancies, and which were rated lowest for their general education preparation, are skills associated with more inclusive education practices (developing alternative instruction, working with special education teachers, working effectively with consultants, and assessing students to plan instruction).

- The more recently prepared special education teachers (1 - 5 years of experience) reported a higher level of agreement between their philosophy of special education and that of their districts. They rated mainstreaming as more importnat than did the teachers prepared 10 or more years ago. They also reported feeling more confident of their skills in areas associated with more inclusive education. They rated their pre-service preparation in the areas of serving as consultants, working with consultants, and working with parents more highly than did their colleagues whose pre-service preparation was completed 10 or more years ago.

- Teachers with 10 or more years of experience rated themselves as having grown more in their professional skills than did their less experienced colleagues. The only area in which the experienced teachers rated themselves lower than the newly minted teachers was in the area of working with general education teachers.

- Special education teachers who had either left special education teaching, or were considering doing so, tended to feel at odds with district policies and directions toward mainstreaming/full inclusion.

- Teachers who had left special education teaching, or who were strongly considering doing so, reported that their special education positions provided them with little opportunity to grow professionally, learn new skills, and respond to interesting challenges. Leavers and probable leavers rated these items significantly lower ($p < .05$) than did current teachers with intentions to remain as special education teachers.

General Education Teacher Preparation Variables

In California, the general education or "basic" credential is a prerequisite to the special education credential. Hence, the respondents in the California study were able to compare their general education and special education preservice preparation. Findings were as follow:

- The dually-credentialed teachers rated the quality of their special education training higher in all areas than their training in general education, regardless of their current status with the district.

- The four areas in which the teachers felt least well-prepared when completing their general education training are all areas seem critical for successful inclusive education: (1) Developing alternative instruction; (2) working with special education teachers; (3) working with consultants; and (4) assessing students to plan instruction.

- The three areas in which they felt their general education preparation had best prepared them were (1) providing appropriate instruction; (2) planning appropriate instruction, and (3) working with other general education teachers.

- Special educators' perceptions of the **attitudes** and **skills** of their general education colleagues appear to influence the decisions of special educators regarding their continuation as teachers in special education.

- Special education teachers frequently feel that much of the mainstream curriculum is appropriate for their special education students.

- The special education teachers also tended to feel that there was conflict between the way they and general education teachers believe lessons should be taught in mainstream classes. This was particularly true for leavers and for special education teachers with more than 10 years of experience.

- Special education teachers reported feeling isolated from, and unappreciated by, their general education colleagues.

Variables Relating to Administrator Training and Preparation

While no attempt was made in any of the studies to address the preparation of administrators directly, a number of findings suggest areas of dissatisfaction on the part of special education teachers relative to interactions with and support from their site administrators and central office special education administrators. Such variables can play an important part in influencing the operation of special education programs and in the modification of the attitudes and skills of principals and general education teachers. Among these findings are the following:

- The degree of special education teachers' satisfaction/ dissatisfaction with their site principals is highly correlated with their decisions to remain in or leave special education teaching.

- Special education teachers tend to give low ratings to the support provided by district-level personnel to special education. They note a lack of support relative to special education placement decisions, IEP development and monitoring, dealing with behavior problems, selecting and implementing curriculum, and interacting with parents.

- Special education teachers who were dissatisfied with special education teaching reported low levels of agreement between their site administrators and themselves relative to (1) how special education students should be taught, and (2) main- streaming practices.

- Special education teachers' perception of their principals' attitudes toward mainstreaming/ inclusion play an important role in the overall job satisfaction of special education teachers.

- Dissatisfied special education teachers felt they received little appreciation or respect from their site administrators. Nearly one-fifth of all former special education teachers in the SDSU/AIR study reported dissatisfaction with the level of respect received from site administrators.

- Teachers who were dissatisfied with their special education teaching roles did not feel their district provided either the quality or amount of support needed to work effectively with their students. They did not feel supported by district administrators in decisions relating to students or parents, and they did not feel they received appropriate recognition from district administrators for their efforts. Over one-fourth of all former special education teachers in the SDSU/AIR study reported dissatisfaction with the level of respect received from central office special education administrators.

- Not surprisingly, special education teachers tended to rate the quality of district-level special education staff as "low" and to question the job design of these staff.

Recommendations

- States need to examine the effect of their credentialing structures on the quality and supply of special education teachers. Structures that are cumbersome may lead to higher numbers of non-credentialed teachers in special education programs, a situation which has serious implications for the quality of education available to students with disabilities.

- Both in-service and pre-service special education teacher preparation programs need to incorporate skills required for more inclusive educational delivery if this emerging model is to be a qualitative option for students with disabilities.

- Personnel preparation efforts in general education, special education, and school administration must identify and address the attitudes, knowledge and skills needed to work with students with disabilities in inclusive settings. This should be done for both pre-service and in-service efforts.

- State credentialing requirements in general education and school administration should develop standards relating to the acquisition of the requisite knowledge and skills for providing an array of qualitative educational opportunities, including inclusive education, for special education students. These should be reflected in both the pre-service and continuing professional development requirements for general education and school administration credentials.

- Educational agencies should take care to provide the inservice preparation needed by teachers as school sites move from one type of service delivery system into another. This preparation should address the philosophy/rationale of the evolving model as well as the skills required to implement it.

- Administrator preparation programs at both the preservice and inservice levels should incorporate standards and competencies that address (1) the provision of various types of support and recognition to teachers, and (2) the full inclusion of special education programs at the individual school site level.

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WORKING PAPER # 8

Strategic Planning for Special Education Teacher Retention

Prepared by

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STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER RETENTION

Strategic planning has become increasingly popular in educational circles as a means of involving key stakeholders in the determination of goals, objectives, and action plans for organizations. Strategic planning provides a framework for setting priorities and establishing action plans to ensure that organizations make the most of their limited resources. The combination of budget cutbacks and the increased complexity of educational and societal challenges has made it more important than ever to achieve a clear sense of priorities in resource allocation and to establish action plans relative to these priorities.

Strategic planning typically consists of the following phases: (1) defining the organizational mission, (2) formulating policies, (3) establishing long- and short-range objectives, (4) identifying strategic alternatives, (5) selecting an appropriate strategy, and (6) implementing the plan (Thompson & Strickland, 1990). The grant announcement under which cooperative agreements were awarded to ERI, RTI, and SDSU/AIR did not specify these phases. However, OSEP underscored its interest in utilization of research knowledge by requiring that each project include a strategic planning component as a means of helping the educational agencies in which the research data were generated to translate the research findings into practices that would increase the likelihood that special education teachers would remain committed to their careers. The goal of this strategic planning component, then, was to set the stage for improved policies and practices relative to issues influencing teacher attrition in these specific districts as well as for similar districts across the nation. It evolved that each of the three projects utilized different strategic planning techniques in pursuing this common goal.

The next section highlights similarities and differences among the three strategic planning "models" that were implemented. Then the strategic planning processes and results are described in more detail for each of the three projects, as three case studies. The following acronyms are used to designate the three strategic planning efforts:

- ERI--Eugene Research Institute, with the Silver City Unified School District (SCU)[1] in the West

- RTI--Research Triangle Institute, with the Memphis City Schools (MCS) in Tennessee

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[1] Silver City is a pseudonym.

- SDSU/AIR--the team of San Diego State University and American Institutes for Research, with the San Diego and the San Jose Unified School Districts (SDUSD, SJUSD) in California

Overview of How the Three Projects Conducted Strategic Planning

All three projects were similar in emphasizing collaboration with key stakeholders, communicating research results to them, helping them to understand the research findings sufficiently to be able to identify strategic actions for addressing selected problem areas, and providing professional "facilitators" to support the groups' planning processes. However, the ERI, RTI, and SDSU/AIR strategic planning interventions were different in several ways, as follows.

Timing

OSEP originally conceived of strategic planning beginning in the third (final) year of each study, but in fact all three projects integrated the process throughout all three project years. The RTI stakeholder group met twice in Year 1, twice in Year 2, and six times in Year 3; between meetings, members led or convened small group work sessions with local stakeholders to obtain input for developing action plans for the strategies formulated by the larger group. The SDSU/AIR stakeholder group met once in Year 1, twice in Year 2, and three times in the last year of the project; also in the final project year, SDSU met four times with a local policy group of key stakeholders (including administrators and teachers) in the San Diego Unified School District. The purpose of the first two meetings was team building in preparation for strategic planning by this SDUSD group; the other two meetings focused on the development of strategic action plans based on the respondent data from that district.

Selection of Stakeholders

The ERI group began with a 16-member advisory panel which included a mix of central office and building level administrators and teaching staff. For the development of the actual strategic action plan, the district's special education director and ERI staff selected 12 professionals from the district, including the special education director, the human resources director for bilingual and special education, both regional directors of special education, and a selection of program specialists, special education teachers, and building administrators who were both former special education teachers.

. The RTI stakeholder group began in Year 1 as a local advisory/planning panel" of 13 stakeholders; they, in turn, augmented their number to 19 in Year 2 and to 21 in Year 3 to represent the district's central office administrators and supervisors, school building administrators, special and general education teachers, parents, the local education association, the special education chair at the state university, and the state department of education.

The SDSU/AIR stakeholder group's representation was even broader; it's approximately 20 members included central office and school site administrators and teachers in the two participating school districts, special education administrators in two county offices of education, the chair of the statewide Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) Administrators Association, chairpersons of the special education teacher preparation programs at four state universities and one private university, the state commission on teacher credentialing, the state teachers association, two professional associations, and the state board of education. There were two overlapping groups of 10 and 12 each at the local SDUSD level.

Roles of Stakeholders and Researchers

By meeting with their stakeholder groups throughout the three-year project period, all three projects were able to extend the groups' role to providing input to the research questions to be addressed, the research design, instrumentation, and interpretation of findings. This active and sustained collaboration was calculated to reinforce a substantive, mutually proactive partnership between the researchers and the stakeholders, and to build ownership of the research findings that were eventually to provide a basis for strategic planning by the stakeholders.

Planning Method, Process, and Product

ERI. The planning process was semi-structured, with ERI providing a basic planning format to follow while allowing for the task force to shape or alter the process as it went along. ERI's role included providing relevant information gained from roughly 200 hours of in-depth interviews with teachers, facilitating the process with the assistance of a professional facilitator, and feeding information from previous meetings and interim evaluations back to the group between sessions. The task force was responsible for identifying the issues that were most pressing to them, developing the plan, and setting its future direction.

Initial meetings of the advisory panel and task force focused on the presentation and discussion of ERI's study findings, and consideration of alternate perspectives and issues. Subsequent meetings led to the identification of 20 issues relating to improving recruitment and retention of special education teachers in the district, and their subsequent sorting into five problem areas. These were linked to district initiatives when appropriate. The group decided to focus on two of the five problem areas (Working Environment, Balancing the Workload) because these were most amenable to concerted action. The task force then engaged in a brainstorming process to develop solutions to these two problem areas; some actions were written up as ready-to-implement solutions to problems, and other recommended actions specified a need for continued discussion and analysis. The task force continues to operate on its own as several work groups, consisting of general and special educators, both teachers and administrators.

RTI. In Year 1 of RTI's project, the stakeholder group ("advisory/planning panel") developed a district-level vision statement and mission statement for the strategic planning process. The focus was to be on personnel, specifically on improved working conditions and personnel policies. RTI prepared the group for the planning process, developed members' understanding of the purposes and expectations of the group, and facilitated the drafting of a "plan-to-plan."

A major, distinguishing feature of the strategic planning model was termed "environmental scanning," which was initiated in Year 1 and continued throughout the three-year project. This activity assessed factors that would be critical to achieving the stated mission and vision for strategic planning. The identified factors included, among many other things, perceived organizational strengths and weaknesses that would either contribute to or limit the district's ability to attract, retain, and support qualified teachers; the teachers' attitudes, perceptions, experiences, and concerns relative to the district's teaching and learning environment; the attitudes of the district's staff, students, parents, and other consumers toward special education, and so forth.

The scan also included the results of the four basic research surveys conducted by RTI. The results of the environmental scan were analyzed collaboratively by the panel and the RTI research team and expressed as a list of 91 statements of problems and opportunities related to enhancing teacher retention in the district. These 91 statements of trends and concerns were classified as 12 topical clusters and, through further analysis, were grouped into nine major problem/opportunity areas. Using Year 1's mission and vision statements as guides, the panel reviewed, discussed, and set priorities for the nine areas; subsequently, the panel agreed that most of the identified trends and concerns could be addressed as *four* strategic issues (School Climate and Conditions; Working Conditions of Personnel in the Schools; Relationships within the School Mainstream Among All

Programs and Personnel; and Personnel Employment, Assignment, and Professional Development Policies and Practices). Each panelist was assigned to one of the four "strategic issue teams," and each team drafted a paper that summarized the issue and specified a related set of goals and outcome objectives. The draft goals and objectives were reviewed by the full panel and revised , and then each team drafted strategies and action steps.

A culminating activity in the strategic planning process was a meeting with 68 selected local stakeholders to review these drafts and specify implementation activities, persons responsible, and time frames. Panel members led and facilitated this special meeting, giving stakeholders an opportunity to buy into and assume ownership of the process. The RTI team then revised the draft strategic plan for the four strategic issue areas. It contains a total of 4 goals, 16 objectives, 32 strategies, and 73 action steps.

SDSU/AIR. A distinguishing feature of the strategic planning process in the SDSU/AIR project was the use of the Electronic Boardroom facilities on the SDSU campus. In a variety of electronically facilitated activities to address findings from data analyses over several stakeholder meetings, the group provided input on their perceptions of what they believed was going on and reasons for the existence of the situation. Electronic tools facilitated group brainstorming to identify action steps which, if taken, would improve the situation (address the reasons given). Other tools enabled them to sort the resulting sets of actions, to formulate more inclusive action statements, and to sort these according to importance, potential for impact, feasibility, appropriateness, etc. Electronic "voting" for the most valued goals, objectives, strategic activities, and specific activities/tasks produced the building blocks for the strategic planning document that was the ultimate achievement of the stakeholder group process.

These statewide stakeholders' meetings always began with a late afternoon-evening meeting at which the SDSU/AIR team reported on project activities and presented results of updated analyses that were relevant to the next day's strategic planning activities. Written and graphical summaries of these highlights were included in participants' conference packets. This material was jointly discussed and interpreted by the stakeholders and the researchers. Stakeholders were prompted to react to the information from the perspectives of the groups they represented, and clarification was provided by the research team. Over the course of the three-year project, the stakeholders' interest in the study findings steadily grew, particularly as a clearer picture emerged of the mobility patterns of the state's educators, the dramatic attrition rates for special educators compared to general educators, and the factors most significantly related to dissatisfaction and decisions to leave special education teaching positions in the San Diego and San Jose school districts. The stakeholders' interpretations of study findings became increasingly insightful, and their statements were instructive to the research team.

The nature of the data analyses in the SDSU/AIR project allowed major strategic planning areas to emerge from the surveys of current and former special education teachers in the two school districts. For example, factorial analyses and comparisons of data for "stayers" and "leavers" revealed major clusters of variables related to five target areas: (1) Working Conditions and School Climate; (2) Relationships with Other Teachers At School Site; (3) Relationships with School Administrators; (4) Support, Appreciation, and Participation from Parents; and (5) Inclusive Education Practices and Policies.

How Things Were Left

ERI reports that the SCU task force, prior to adjourning, made several closing recommendations to the special education director regarding next steps, and asked that the task force be kept updated regarding the implementation of the strategic action plan. The group also urged the director to inform the entire *faculty* of the work of the task force and to update *them* on any actions taken by the district as a result. The district committed to convening several groups, beginning in the Spring of 1995, to work further on the issues that the task force had identified. Each task force member was invited to join one or more of these groups. A report summarizing project findings was sent to *all* teachers who participated in the study.

RTI provided the MCS with both a hard copy and a camera-ready copy of the individual reports of four major studies in the MCS that had supported the strategic planning process, along with the final report and executive summary, and the Strategic Plan. RTI recommended that the MCS use the camera-ready copy to reproduce and distribute the executive summary and the Strategic Plan to each of the 68 stakeholders who had participated in the final planning meeting, and that the executive summary also be distributed to members of the MCS Board of Education. In January of 1995, the Strategic Plan was formally submitted to the MCS superintendent, who has given all participants assurances that its recommendations will generally be adopted.

The SDSU/AIR project does not close until June 30, 1995, at which time the state-level strategic planning will be completed as will the district-level strategic planning in the San Diego Unified School District. During the 1994-95 academic year in the San Jose Unified School District, changes occurred in administrative personnel at four levels: superintendent, associate superintendent for curriculum, director of special education, and several special education program administrators. These new leaders have needed to investigate the potential usefulness of the strategic planning activity around issues of special education teacher satisfaction, retention, and attrition, and to do so within the context of the many other challenges they have faced as newly appointed administrators. For this reason, by the close of the current project, only the initial stage of strategic planning will have been completed in the SJUSD.

Conclusions

ERI, RTI, and SDSU/AIR were gratified by the enthusiasm and support of their respective stakeholder groups, and the quality of their participation in strategic planning activities. In all three projects, the stakeholder groups conveyed the perception that the process had raised their consciousness, based on research findings obtained in their participating school districts. It was apparent that the efforts that the three research teams made to integrate their study findings into stakeholder dialogue had also instilled in the stakeholders an appreciation of the value of a data-based approach to strategic decision making.

On the other hand, broad-based support established during the strategic planning process, and assurances that recommendations will be seriously considered, are necessary but insufficient evidence with which to claim *impact* on the teaching and learning environments of the four participating districts. While strategic planning lays the groundwork for change by targeting strategic actions that could be taken, it stops short of the adaptation of recommendations to suit the *specific sites* where actions are to be implemented, and it stops short of the installation of change and the evaluation of *outcomes*. Given the mutually supportive findings from the ERI, RTI, and SDSU/AIR studies, target outcomes might be conceptualized in terms of changes in teacher perceptions of their working conditions and/or support, variables known to affect the satisfaction and retention of special education teachers and, ultimately, the quality of education provided to students with disabilities.

THE THREE CASE STUDIES OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

CASE STUDY 1.	Strategic Planning for Teacher Retention in the Silver City Unified School District (SCU) with the Eugene Research Institute (ERI)
CASE STUDY 2.	Strategic Planning for Teacher Retention in the Memphis City Schools (MCS) with the Research Triangle Institute (RTI)
CASE STUDY 3.	Strategic Planning for Teacher Retention in the San Diego and San Jose Unified School Districts (SDUSD, SJUSD) with San Diego State University (SDSU) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR)

Case Study #1
Strategic Planning for Teacher Retention in the Silver City Unified School District with the Eugene Research Institute (ERI)

Demographic and Contextual Factors

The Silver City Unified School District (SCU) spans a geographic area of 228 square miles and has jurisdiction over 74 elementary schools; 18 middle schools; 10 high schools; and 2 special schools. Of the 3,373 teachers employed in the district, 371 are special education teachers. Of the total district enrollment of 60,000 students, 2,100 are in the special education program. The ethnicity of the total student enrollment is 50% Caucasian, 34% Hispanic, 8% Native American, and 8% African American.

In the third year of ERI's involvement with SCU, the district began an "improvement" initiative that included a special education teacher retention objective. This provided a positive context for the strategic planning process and lent it saliency.

Composition of the Strategic Planning Team

When the study began, a 16-member advisory panel was established to assist ERI in planning and designing the research studies to be conducted. Representatives included a mix of central office and building level administration. Over the course of the three-year project, this group served to inform ERI on issues of concern to district personnel, as well as provide extensive input into instrumentation for the research studies.

For the actual strategic action plan, the district's special education director and ERI staff selected 12 professionals from the district, including the special education director, the human resources director for bilingual and special education, both regional directors of special education, and a selection of program specialists, special education teachers, and building administrators who were both former special education teachers. Many of these individuals had also served on the advisory panel.

The Planning Approach and Process

Two distinctive features of the planning approach taken by ERI were:

- dissemination of research findings, not only to administrators, but also to all teachers who participated in the ERI studies; and

- the creation of a structure for joint planning and decision making, including both teachers administrators, which would continue to address concerns after completion of the research project.

ERI staff met with members of the advisory panel five times over the course of three years: twice in Year 1, once in Year two, and two times in Year 3. There were an additional three intensive strategic planning sessions with the task force which took place at the end of Year 3.

Meetings #1 and #2

During the project's first year, ERI staff met twice with the advisory panel. These meetings provided opportunities to discuss the project in detail and begin building working relationships with key district staff. Data were gathered regarding district organization, service options, and teacher concerns. The group provided extensive input survey content. Advisory group involvement served to enhance district-level relevance of the data and to develop stronger ties for future planning.

Meeting #3

ERI staff met again in Year 2 with members of the advisory panel to present a report of survey findings and attrition rates, obtain reactions, and continue discussion of the relevance of data for strategic planning. The meeting provided more opportunities to discuss aspects of district operation and issues of concern to district personnel.

Meeting #4

Early in the third year, 15 hours of meetings were conducted between project staff and the special education director. Topics included: how strategic action planning related to special education teacher retention and fit into overall district objectives; prior attempts to address work place problems and issues; major barriers to change as viewed from the perspective of the administration; and the importance of involving the teachers union in the planning process.

Meeting #5

ERI staff met with a task force of members of the advisory panel: the director of special education and pupil services; the assistant directors of the two regional service centers; the assistant directors for bilingual and special education and special education personnel; and a member of the district's department of research and evaluation. ERI shared findings from the interview study with the group and obtained their reactions. Administrative questions, explanations, and concerns were incorporated in revisions of the report, and disseminated at subsequent strategic planning meetings (below).

Meetings #6, #7, and #8

At these intensive strategic action planning sessions, the SCU task force met with ERI project staff and a professional facilitator. The three sessions were spread over a three-month period in the final year of the project. The planning process was semi-structured, with ERI providing a basic planning format to follow while allowing for the task force to shape or alter the process as it went along. ERI's role included providing relevant information gained from roughly *200 hours of in-depth interviews with teachers*, facilitating the process with the assistance of a professional facilitator, and feeding information from previous meetings and interim evaluations back to the group between sessions. The task force was responsible for identifying the issues that were most pressing to them, developing the plan, and setting its future direction.

The first of these final three meetings of the task force focused on presentation and discussion of ERI's study findings. For each major finding, the group was given an opportunity to raise questions, provide additional information, and debate the issues. Through this process, alternate perspectives were considered and the group's understanding of the issues was expanded.

Next, the group undertook the issue-identification phase of the process. Each participant was asked to identify and share what they viewed as the three most pressing issues related to recruiting and retaining quality special education teachers in the district. Group members were encouraged to draw from the day's discussion, as well as from their own experiences, in completing this activity.

Each issue was written on an index card, passed to the front of the room, and displayed for group consideration. The issues were then discussed by the task force and grouped thematically through a collaborative process.

Close to 20 issues were identified which were organized into the following five broad categories: (1) Developing A Common Focus Between Special and General Education; (2) Work Environment; (3) Balancing the Workload; (4) Professional Development Opportunities; and (5) Funding. Most issues identified were not unique to special education; they were larger organizational issues.

Two final meetings were convened to clarify issues and generate action steps to address the problem areas they had identified within the five strategic planning categories, above. This was largely a brainstorming process where all ideas were heard and documented. Some actions were written up as ready-made solutions to problems. Others specified a need for continued discussion and analysis.

Examples of Action Recommendations in the Strategic Plan

In total, 152 action recommendations were made during the strategic action planning. The group focused most of its energy on developing plans for improving teachers' working environments and workload manageability, because these areas were considered most pressing *and* amenable to concerted action. The following summarizes a selection of action recommendations:

- *Collegial support systems for teachers*. The task force felt strongly that teachers needed more opportunities for *substantive* collegial interaction to help them manage changes that were taking place in their work, and to facilitate professional development. From the extensive and lengthy discussions that took place on this topic, several concerns, ideas, and recommendations emerged. The group was highly responsive to the fact that teachers are growing increasingly frustrated with traditionally structured inservice training that does not seem to address their specific concerns or needs. The group strongly recommended that teachers be given a primary role in developing and running collegial meetings to ensure that they are based on what teachers have stated that they want and need. Two types of collegial support systems were recommended:

  Monthly study groups. Small, voluntary groups of teachers from across the district to get together on a monthly basis to study/discuss areas of interest to the group. A teacher leader would run meetings. The group would set the topic. Guest speakers would be invited. The group recommended that the special education director request a credit opportunity for teachers who participate in these study groups.

Peer support network. The group recommended setting up an information network so that teachers could easily reach one another when they needed specific technical assistance or advice. The establishment of such a network would require: a staff survey to determine areas within which teachers would be willing to provide technical assistance; and development of a database with teachers' phone numbers. The group recommended that a task force be assigned to further discuss and ultimately develop this network.

It was further recommended that a group be established to continue to explore and develop ways to provide increased opportunities for teachers to get together to share what they are doing. The emphasis would be on ways to communicate and share models for effective practice and to build teacher networks.

- *Opening up communication between the central office and the teaching staff.* Another major issue addressed at length relates to improving communication between special education teachers and the central office administration. The task force was concerned primarily with establishing *permanent* systems for information exchange *between* the parties. The majority of recommendations focused on establishing and making good use of teacher advisory groups to provide greater levels of teacher input to the central office. *Extensive discussion also occurred regarding the importance of involving teachers in making decisions that directly affect their work.* Also discussed at length was the circumstance in which decisions are made that are beyond the control of teachers and central office, and the importance of open communication and providing opportunities for teachers to raise questions and concerns.

How Things Were Left

The task force, prior to adjourning, made several closing recommendations to the special education director regarding next steps. The group asked to be kept informed and updated regarding the implementation of the action plan. The group also urged the director to inform the entire faculty of the work of the task force and to update them on any actions taken by the district as a result. The district committed to convening several groups, beginning in the Spring of 1995, to work further on the issues that the task force had identified. Each task force member was invited to join one or more of these groups. A report summarizing project findings was sent to *all* teachers who participated in the study.

ERI's Conclusions About Outcomes of the Strategic Planning Process

Overall, the issues taken on by the task force were in many ways consistent with the issues raised by the special education teachers who were surveyed and interviewed in the study. Clearly, however, the impact that the action recommendations will have on change and resolution of these issues is yet to be determined. Minimally, awareness and understanding of issues faced by the special education teachers working in this district have been heightened, and a process for developing and implementing a plan for resolving them has begun.

Case Study #2

Strategic Planning for Teacher Retention in the Memphis City Schools with the Research Triangle Institute (RTI)

Demographic and Contextual Factors

The Memphis City School system (MCS) serves the city of Memphis, which has a population of 640,000 and is the 18th largest city in the nation (USA Today, June 14, 1991). The population of Memphis is 55 percent Black and 45 percent White, and the racial composition of the students in the MCS is 80 percent Black and 20 percent White. The MCS is a member of the Council of Great City Schools and is the 15th largest school district in the nation. It has 163 schools, employs a total of 5,225 teachers (627 of whom are special education teachers, and serves 107,819 students in grades K-12.

Providing a complementary backdrop for the project's strategic planning process were the Board of Education's *Vision 2000: Strategic Plan for Memphis City Schools*, as well as several other initiatives and future plans of the MCS central administration in school redesign and restructuring.

Composition of the Strategic Planning Team

At the initiation of the study, a 13-member Advisory/Planning Panel was selected to serve throughout the life of the study. In Year 1 of the project, this group was referred to as the Advisory/Planning Panel because its responsibilities extended beyond strategic planning, i.e., to include advising the RTI team on planning and designing the research studies to be conducted in the MCS. The Panel conducted a stakeholder analysis to identify and screen potential candidates to serve on the study's strategic planning team in Years 1 and 2. As a result of the stakeholder analysis, the Panel recommended that its own members act as the strategic planning team, with the addition of six other persons to broaden the representation of parents, principals, and MCS supervisors of general and special education programs. These recommendations were accepted and in Year 2 the Panel was expanded to 19 members. In Year 3, two more persons were added, resulting in a 21-member Panel that represented major MCS stakeholders as follows: associate superintendent of student programs and services, director of special education, 2 special education supervisors, 3 elementary school principals, a junior high school principal, 2 high school special education teachers (one of whom also represented the Memphis Education Association), an elementary school special education teacher, 2 general education supervisor, a high school general education teacher, 2 parents, the special education department chairperson at the state university, a representative from the special education division of the state department of education, and 3 external consultants with expertise in strategic planning, personnel supply/demand issues, and special education teacher preparation.

The Planning Approach and Process

The Panel/Strategic Planning Team met ten times during the course of the three-year study--twice in each of Years 1 and 2 and six times in Year 3. Between meetings, individual members led/held small group work sessions with local stakeholders to obtain input for developing action plans for the strategies formulated by the team at large. All planning meetings and small group work sessions were held in Memphis. These meetings were facilitated by the RTI research team and were chaired by a member of the Memphis team.

In the first Panel meeting, the RTI research team established a firm foundation for the planning process by providing Panel members with an understanding of the strategic planning process and the purposes and expectations of the Panel. Time lines and decision rules were established, related vision and mission statements were drafted, a plan-to-plan was developed, and the process of scanning the environment for trends, threats, and opportunities that influence the achievement of the goals underlying the draft mission statement was initiated.

The strategic planning process was implemented in seven steps:

1 *Obtain the superintendent's commitment and support.* The MCS superintendent committed to the study before it was initiated. As the study progressed, the superintendent was periodically briefed on the study's status and given an opportunity to review and react to drafts of such key study materials as survey plans and questionnaires, vision and mission statements, the strategic action plan, and the final report of study findings.

2 *Involve and collaborate with stakeholders.* Ongoing collaboration between researchers and practitioners was emphasized, and the above group of key stakeholders were involved in all aspects of the process--from the identification of educational issues and problems through the development of the final strategic action plan. This step promoted community support to help ensure the usefulness,

acceptance, and implementation of the strategic action plan.

3 *Develop related vision and mission statements*. In Year 1, the Panel developed district-level vision and mission statements to guide the planning process. The vision statement sets forth the desired future for the MCS. The mission statement focuses on personnel, and on improved conditions and policies involving personnel, that will contribute to achieving the overall vision for the schools.

4 *Conduct environmental scanning*. The environment within which the MCS special education program is operating was "scanned" in order to build a well-grounded knowledge base and identify key factors, trends, and/or events that could affect attainment of the vision for the MCS special education program and fulfillment of the program's mission. This scan assessed such critical success factors as:

- The organizational structure of the MCS and its special education program.
- The MCS's strengths and weaknesses related to the stated vision and mission (i.e., those factors that would either contribute to or limit the district's ability to attract, retain, and support qualified special and general education teachers), and the teachers' attitudes, perceptions, experiences, and concerns relative to the MCS' teaching and learning environment.
- State and local philosophies, values, political considerations, and general economic conditions.
- The attitudes of the district's staff, students, parents, and other consumers toward special education.
- General external forces over which the school district has little or no control but that impact on the educational program, e.g., geographic location and changes in (1) state and/or federal policies related to special education, (2) training, certifying, and licensing teachers, and (3) social values in society.

The environmental scan also included the results of the four research studies conducted by RTI in the MCS and reported elsewhere; in general, these studies explored special and general education teachers' attitudes about, and perceptions of, the MCS teaching and learning environment. The findings of the research surveys were presented to, and interpreted for, the Panel, which in turn incorporated them in the environmental scan. Scanning was a continuing process throughout the three-year study. As additional scanning information was gathered and reviewed, it was organized and incorporated into an "updated" scanning summary.

5 *Identify problems, barriers, and opportunities.* The results of the environmental scan were analyzed by the Panel and RTI research team and expressed as a list of 91 statements of problems/opportunities related to enhancing teacher retention in the MCS. These 91 statements of trends and concerns were classified as 12 topical clusters: (1) positive trends, including developments underway in MCS while this project was taking place; (2) personnel at risk, which refers to levels of attrition, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction among specific types of personnel; (3) quality of personnel; (4) teaching conditions; (5) school climate and conditions; (6) relationships within the school mainstream; (7) inclusive education, i.e., the integration of students with special needs into general education and activities of the school; (8) bureaucratic requirements and central office issues; (9) teacher hiring and assignment practices; (10) the supply of new personnel; (11) continuing professional development; and (12) long-term planning.

6 *Identify and select strategic issues.* Through further analysis, most of these 91 problem/opportunity statements were grouped into nine major problem/opportunity areas. Using the vision and mission statements as a guide, the Panel reviewed, discussed, and prioritized these nine areas in terms of their perceived importance in maintaining the district's vision and fulfilling its mission. These nine areas, in *descending* order of importance, are: (1) teaching conditions; (2) school climate and conditions; (3) relationships with the school mainstream; (4) teacher hiring and assignment practices; (5) continuing professional development; (6) inclusive education; (7) bureaucratic requirements and central office issues; (8) supply of new personnel; and (9) long-term planning.

Subsequently, the Panel agreed that most of the identified trends and concerns could be addressed as four strategic issues: (1) school climate and conditions; (2) working conditions of personnel in the schools; (3) relationships within the school mainstream among all programs and personnel; and (4) personnel employment, assignment, and professional development policies and practices. These four strategic issues covered all but 12 of the 91 original problem or opportunity areas.

7 *Develop goals, objectives, strategies, and action steps for strategic issues.* Each panelist was assigned to one of four "strategic issue teams", and each team drafted a paper

that summarized the strategic issue and specified a related set of goals and outcome objectives. These drafts were reviewed by the full Panel and revised accordingly.

Working with the revised goal statements and objectives, each team drafted strategies and action steps for achieving the objectives. The full Panel then reviewed and revised these strategies and action steps, with an emphasis on removing redundancies or inconsistencies across the four issues.

In November 1994, the Panel met with 68 selected local stakeholders to review the draft strategic action plan and help specify implementation activities, identify the persons to authorize and implement each activity, and develop implementation time frames. Panel members served as leaders and facilitators for this special meeting. This meeting gave these stakeholders an opportunity to "buy into" and assume ownership of the process.

Using the input obtained from the 68 stakeholders, the RTI research team revised the draft strategic plan and resubmitted it to the stakeholders and panelists for final review. The revised plan specified goals, objectives, strategies, and action steps for each of the four strategic issues. For each action step, it specified implementation activities, the names and/or titles of those responsible for authorization and implementation, and implementation time frames.[2] The 75-page plan contains a total of 4 goals, 16 objectives, 32 strategies, and 73 action steps in the plan. It also includes references to the continuation of certain activities that were initiated by MCS while this project was evolving.

Feedback from the stakeholder review was incorporated in the final strategic action plan, which is entitled *Strategic Plan for Personnel Recruitment, Retention, and Professional Development.*

Examples of Action Recommendations in the Strategic Plan

The 75-page Strategic Plan presents in detailed outline format the goals, objectives, major strategies, and actions steps for each of the above four strategic targets: School Climate and Conditions; Working Conditions of Personnel in the Schools; Relationships Within the School Mainstream Among All Programs And Personnel; and Personnel

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[2] For some of the action steps, the Panel was not able to specify the names of key participants and start/completion dates. It is anticipated that the MCS will make these determinations as the plan is implemented.

Employment, Assignment, and Professional Development Policies and Practices. Included for each *action step* are: statements of specific implementation activities; the names and/or titles of those responsible for authorization and implementation; and implementation time frames. Below is an illustrative excerpt for the first of several objectives covered under the *School Climate and Conditions* target area.

A. School Climate and Conditions

Goal A: To improve the school climate for general and special education teachers in the MCS system.

Objective A-1: To increase parental involvement.
Strategy A-1-1: Enlist parents to serve in school-related activities, by encouraging principals to take the following steps.

A-1-1-1: Appoint parents to committees and enlist them as volunteers.

1. Establish a Special Education Parent Support Group at the school level (with ties to the Parent Advisory Board).

2. Appoint a Parent Liaison to work with all families of students enrolled in each school.

3. Encourage principals to make parents and teachers of special education students, and the students themselves, part of the total school program.

4. Ask parents to complete a school volunteer form at registration.

Authorization: MCS Superintendent; school principals

Persons responsible for implementation: Each school principal (leader) and guidance counselor; special education teachers; general education teachers.

Other key participants: Director of the Division of Youth and Family Services; parents

Resources: The W. D. Callian Parenting Center; MCS

Teaching/Learning Academy; Parent Liaisons with the MCS Division of Exceptional Children

Start Date: September 1995

Completion Date: Ongoing activities but deadlines should be set for putting activities in place.

How Things Were Left

Effective dissemination between researchers, practitioners, and other key stakeholders was emphasized throughout the project's duration to keep everyone informed about the study's purpose, objectives, status, outcomes, and opportunities for collaboration. However, the major dissemination effort was in the last year of the study as final results became available. RTI provided the MCS with both a hard copy and a camera-ready copy of the individual reports of four major studies in the MCS that had supported the strategic planning process, the final report and executive summary, and the Strategic Plan. RTI recommended that the MCS use the camera-ready copy to reproduce and distribute copies of the executive summary and the Strategic Plan to each of the 68 stakeholders who participated in the final planning meeting, and that the executive summary also be distributed to members of the MCS Board of Education. RTI also recommended that the MCS make copies of the full report available to those Board members who want more information about the study's methodology and findings.

In January 1995, the Strategic Plan was formally submitted to the MCS superintendent, who has given all participants assurances that its recommendations will generally be adopted.

RTI's Conclusions About Outcomes of the Strategic Planning Process

The quality of the Strategic Plan and the enthusiasm and support of the local participants greatly exceeded the expectations that the RTI research team had "going into the study." This was due primarily to the support and leadership of the MCS superintendent and administrative staff, and the willingness of key stakeholders (e.g., teachers, parents, principals, program supervisors, Memphis State University staff, Tennessee State Department of Education personnel) to support and get actively involved in the planning process.

RTI and MCS concurred that the development of the Strategic Plan and its submission to the MCS administration was a major step toward improving the teaching and learning environment in the MCS. However, although the process of developing the plan may have challenged or changed the way MCS policymakers and practitioners identified and viewed problems, the full impact of the plan cannot be realized unless it is implemented. The ultimate measure of its quality is the impact that its implementation has on the MCS teaching and learning environment.

One of the recommendations in the strategic action plan was for the MCS to establish a permanent Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) Council for the district. This Council would have responsibility for participatory planning to ensure that the following features of the CSPD are carried out: collaboration; needs assessment; preservice; continuing education for all personnel, including parents; dissemination of promising practices; technical assistance; evaluation. Given the broad-based support established during the planning process and the assurances of the superintendent that the plan's recommendations will generally be adopted, RTI is hopeful that the plan will be implemented and updated annually, under the oversight of either the current Advisory/Planning Panel or a newly formed CSPD Council.

Case Study #3
Strategic Planning for Teacher Retention in the San Diego and San Jose Unified School Districts
with San Diego State University (SDSU) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR)

Demographic and Contextual Factors

Two large, urban, ethnically diverse northern and southern California school districts participated in the SDSU/AIR project. The San Diego Unified School District covers over 200 square miles, has jurisdiction over 156 schools with a total enrollment of 128,000 (13,000 of whom are special education students). The teaching staff numbers 5,750, of whom 850 are special education teachers. The ethnic groups to which students belong are Hispanic (32.6%), White (30.6%), African-American (16.8%), Philippine (8.4%), Indochinese (7.6%), and Asian, Pacific Islander, Alaskan Indian (4.0%) The district teaching force numbers 5,750 (of whom 850 are special education teachers.

The San Jose Unified School district serves an 80 square mile area. There are 42 schools with a total enrollment of 28,436, of whom 2,559 students are in the special education program. The total number of teachers is 1,431, of whom 172 are special education teachers. Data on ethnicity provided by the district indicate that 45.8% of the students are Hispanic, 34.2% are White, 12.6% are Asian, 3.4% are African-American, 2.2% are Pacific Islander/Alaskan Indian/American Indian, and 1.6% are Philippine.

Both districts were impacted by significant turnover in top administrative positions during the course of the project. The most extreme case was the San Jose Unified School District, in which new administrators were appointed at four levels during the last year of the project.

Composition of the Statewide Stakeholder Group

The SDSU/AIR project design required the involvement of stakeholders who represented agencies and groups in a position to recommend and implement policies and practices at both the state and district levels to influence teacher decision making relative to retention and attrition. Approximately 20 individuals were members of this group. *Statewide* representatives included: a member of the state board of education who is also a parent of a child with severe handicaps and who also served on the state advisory commission on special education; a consultant to the state department of education's special education division who helps schools coordinate policy for general and special education as well as teacher recruitment, retention, and statewide staff development; a special education consultant on the staff of the commission on teacher credentialing, who also provides direction to the establishment and monitoring of university training programs for special educators; a member of the state commission on teacher credentialing, who is also a teacher and program specialist for the San Diego Union High School District, responsible for developing educational programs for special education; four chairpersons of special education departments at state universities, who collectively have held positions in the state association of professors of special education, on the ad hoc committee of special education personnel availability for the state teacher credentialing commission, on the task force on restructuring the special education credential, and on the advisory committee for the state comprehensive system of personnel development; a staff consultant to the state teachers association who was formerly a special education teacher and administrator, and is a member of several statewide advisory bodies including the ad hoc committee on special education personnel availability; two professors in university special education departments, one of whom is also the president of the state federation/council for exceptional children, and the other of whom is co-chairperson of the state comprehensive system of personnel development advisory committee; directors of two county-level special education departments, one of these individuals also being a director of a Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) of which there are 116 in California; and a second SELPA director who also chairs the SELPA administrators association, a group that is actively seeks effective responses to the state's shortage of special education teachers.

Representing key stakeholders in the *San Diego Unified School District* were: an assistant superintendent who had held positions in special education administration for several years; two human resources administrators; the director of special education; a program coordinator; and a resource teacher. Representatives for stakeholders in the *San Jose Unified School District* were: the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction; the special education director and one of her program administrators; and the director of certified staffing.

The Planning Approach and Process

The Statewide Stakeholders Committee met six times: once in Year 1, twice in Year 2, and three times in the last year of the project. (Also in the final project year, SDSU met four times with a local policy group of key stakeholders, including administrators and teachers, in the San Diego Unified School District. The purpose of the first two meetings was team building in preparation for strategic planning by this SDUSD group; the other two meetings focused on the development of strategic action plans based on the respondent data from that district.)

The overall approach taken by SDSU/AIR to capturing the interest of the stakeholders, and equipping them to "own" the strategic planning process had these features:

- use of Electronic Boardroom technology to facilitate brainstorming and consensus building
- providing stakeholders with updates of emerging study findings in a manner that stimulated reflective thinking
- gradually, over the course of the six meetings, moving participants from thinking globally about attrition/retention issues to thinking more specifically, focusing on themes that were emerging from the data obtained in the San Diego and San Jose Unified School Districts
- "recycling" the strategies and actions they had proposed at previous meetings by having them reconsider them in the light of the research team's updated findings and more focused analyses

The summary below attempts to provide a concrete picture of how the Electronic Boardroom facilitated the planning process and how in each of the six meetings, *every* participant incorporated his or her perspective to the creation and refinement of the detailed recommendations that constitute the final Strategic Plan.

The Electronic Boardroom

The Electronic Boardroom facilities on the SDSU campus is a planning and decision-making laboratory that facilitates traditional planning processes in combination with a variety of computer and audio/visual support systems to create a unique meeting environment. Participants sit at networked computer workstations that run special software and use either desktop or laptop computers to facilitate strategic planning. A facilitator combines normal group discussion with "electronic brainstorming." These activities use a variety of tools that facilitate problem identification, generation of problem solutions, organization of ideas, and evaluation and rank-ordering of goals, objectives, strategic approaches, specific activities/tasks proposed by participants. Participants are anonymous, i.e., it is impossible to determine which individual in the group authored a particular idea in the database that is created during electronic brainstorming. Key advantages to this approach are the flexibility afforded by the software tools that were used to structure group input, and which were mixed and matched to the particular objectives of the meeting. The technology and the process made meetings more productive by reducing counter-productive group interaction and keeping participants on the desired track. Another advantage was the ability to provide participants with printed results of their efforts at the end of each meeting.

Meeting #1

The first meeting of the stakeholders' group was held about six months into Year 1 of the SDSU/AIR project. Its purpose was to engage the stakeholders in helping the researchers set directions for the upcoming studies of special education teacher retention and attrition, and the subsequent strategic planning activities throughout the project. At a dinner meeting preceding the full-day work session, the research team provided the group with an overview of the project purposes, design, and major activities, and oriented them to the objectives of the strategic planning process and the expected role of the stakeholder group in producing recommended actions to be taken by designated entities at state and district levels to strategically address the factors that influence special education teacher retention and attrition. Stakeholders provided input about their backgrounds and the relevance of their perspectives to the strategic planning process.

The following day's meeting was held on the SDSU campus, where stakeholders participated in Electronic Boardroom activities for about three hours; it proved to be a superb technology to facilitate interactions and input from the newly constituted group. A professional facilitator guided them in a sequence of brainstorming exercises which required each stakeholder to provide input via individual computer work stations. In these exercises, they identified the 188 issues that they believed are associated with teacher attrition (statewide and locally), categorized these issues under 12 headings, and rank-ordered the 12 categories. Then they again used the electronic brainstorming technology to propose policy recommendations for addressing the 12 issue areas, and rank-ordered the recommendations within each area. In addition to providing important information on the stakeholders' perspectives to the research team, this sequence of activities provided a preview of how the Electronic Boardroom would be used over the life of the project.

The concluding activity of this initial stakeholder meeting was a roundtable discussion in which each participant described their individual interests in the study, their hopes and expectations for it, and their suggestions relative to project and questionnaire design. Although a lot of faith was expressed in the value of the study findings as a guide to deciding what strategic actions should be taken, and how to structure these actions, some concerns were expressed relative to the research team's ability "to get at the subtleties" of factors influencing attrition and retention of special educators. The team assured the group that they, as stakeholder representatives, would be reviewing drafts of study instruments and recommending modifications and additions in them at future meetings.

Meeting #2

The second stakeholder meeting was held eight months later (early in Year 2 of the project), by which time the research team could present preliminary results from analyses of several data sets, and distribute copies of the survey instrument which had been refined using stakeholder input from the preceding meeting. At the late afternoon-evening meeting, the research team highlighted preliminary results: the impact of a number of factors on the patterns of statewide teacher mobility which were identified in longitudinal analyses of the California Basic Education Data System (CBEDS); reasons for staying in or leaving teaching which were identified in a "critical incident study" of a national sample of current and former special education teachers; and early trends emerging from the telephone interviews in progress with current special education teachers in the two participating school districts.

The next day's work session in the Electronic Boardroom opened with an exercise in which the stakeholders reviewed and revised the potential research questions to be asked relative to the data that were currently being collected. The printout of their deliberations showed how they consolidated, augmented, and refined the questions they wanted the research to address, and listed the 38 questions in the resulting set in order of importance, based on electronic voting by the stakeholders. Many of the 38 questions addressed aspects of "job satisfaction's relationship to various kinds of teacher support." (Subsequently, the research team used the list to plan further data analyses.)

In the next electronic exercise, the group proposed strategic actions to address specific variables that the preliminary analysis of the San Diego and San Jose survey data suggested were significant: formal mentoring by a mentor teacher; direct assistance from the site principal; informal mentoring by special education colleagues; assistance in developing IEPs; adequacy of instructional materials and supplies provided to teachers; quality of support received from site administrators relative to behavior problems. For each of these factors, the stakeholders used their computer terminals to "forecast" what would need to be done, who would need to do it, what it would take to do it, and how feasible it is to do it. The aim of the exercise was to facilitate reflective thinking by the stakeholders about these possible strategic targets. The group then used a 3-step Likert-scale process to rate electronically the importance, likely influence on policy, and feasibility of each of the proposed strategic actions. The computer printout listed the strategies they judged to be most important, promising, and feasible.

In the afternoon's concluding discussion, stakeholders indicated the kinds of data summaries they would find most useful, and the research team took these preferences into account in preparing summaries for future meetings.

Meeting #3

The third stakeholder meeting was held about midway through Year 2, by which time the telephone survey of current special education teachers in the two participating districts was 80% complete and the database represented about 400 special education teachers. At the late afternoon-evening briefing of stakeholders, the research team presented results from further CBEDS analyses of the statewide mobility patterns and characteristics of special and general educators over a five year period. They also presented statistically significant findings from the nearly-complete survey of current special education teachers. To increase the salience of the presentation for the next day's strategic planning work session, the survey results were organized by the same topical areas and variable clusters to be used for the electronic brainstorming activities. One major set of variables was related to the *changing roles* of special educators; the second major set of variables was related to teacher *support*. Stakeholders were provided with 13 user-friendly tables that enabled them to scan lists of variables that were relevant to 9 aspects of support and 4 aspects of changing roles, and to compare the results for each of the two school districts. The stakeholders responded enthusiastically, engaging the research team in extensive discussion for the remainder of the afternoon-evening meeting.

Heretofore, the group's strategic planning sessions had been exploratory and hypothetical, because study data were quite preliminary. Now, results of the nearly completed survey of current special education teachers were expected to remain stable, and strategic planning would be grounded in reality. In the next day's Electronic Boardroom session, the stakeholders spent the entire day in computer-based strategic planning activities to identify actions that can be taken by state agencies, policy makers, and local educational agencies to address the variables the study findings determined to be critical to teacher satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with regard to the various aspects of their changing roles and support. To facilitate reflective thinking, these two major topical areas were further divided into four strategic planning targets that were consistent with study findings that had been presented the preceding evening: teacher feelings about their changing roles: teacher perceptions relative to special education/general education interactions (both general education teachers and administrators); teacher perceptions of training support and needs; and teacher perceptions in terms of supervisor support and assistance. Taking one area at a time, and encouraged to refer to the 13 data tables from the prior evening's presentation, the stakeholders used their computer terminals to input proposed actions that should be taken by state agencies/policy makers and by local educational agencies. Then they rated each action relative to its feasibility and expected impact.

The computer printouts of the group's work listed the proposed actions for each stakeholder level (state/policy maker, local/district) for each of the four strategic target areas; and the recommended actions according to their rank-order score for impact/feasibility. In the concluding computer-based activity, stakeholders were asked to consider what had been discussed and generated so far, and to suggest additional issues or topics to probe during the upcoming interviews with individuals who had *left* special education teaching in the two districts. They generated a list of 72 questions and sorted them into 15 clusters; these data were subsequently used by the research team to refine the draft "exiter questionnaire."

Meeting #4

The fourth meeting occurred at the beginning of Year 3, when preliminary results of the "exiter survey" were available for approximately 200 individuals who had left their teaching positions in the SDUSD or the SJUSD between 1990-93. At the opening afternoon-evening session, the retention/attrition comparisons for leavers and stayers were presented to the stakeholder group in a variety of formats, including bar charts, data tables, and lists of especially significant findings regarding factors that were shown to be important in decisions to leave the profession, to contribute to satisfaction/dissatisfaction, and that distinguished leavers from stayers. Of special interest to stakeholders were results of a comparison of the data collected from the group of 451 teachers who were teaching in 1992-93, and the data collected from 224 teachers who had left their special education teaching positions in the two districts during the period 1990-93. This analysis identified 46 survey items in which it was found that there were *statistically significant differences between the responses of stayers and leavers.* The stakeholders were provided with a summary listing of the items, clustered under five potential target areas for strategic planning activities: (1) site level administrative support; (2) support and recognition from general and special education teachers and central office special education staff; (3) working conditions and school climate; (4) support, appreciation, and participation from parents; and (5) appropriate pre-service preparation and continuing professional development. The summary indicated which statistical differences were applicable to both school districts, to the San Diego district only, or to the San Jose district only. Another summary in which the stakeholders were keenly interested presented the open-ended responses to survey items that asked why the (leavers) had left teaching, what would make them (leavers) want to return to teaching special education in the district, and what things they (stayers and leavers) had liked best (and disliked most) about their special education teaching position.

Most of the next day's Electronic Boardroom session dealt with the first three of the above five issue areas. The same sequence of activities was followed for each area. First, the research team reviewed with the group the relevant research (charts, graphs, lists of findings) from the prior evening's presentation of findings for that area. Second, the facilitator guided a computer-based activity that addressed the question, "Why might this be happening?" The stakeholders input their perceptions of what they believed was going on, and then the facilitator helped the group classify their responses (reasons for the existence of the situation). An example of a classification under the area of Site Level Administrative Support was *"Principals' lack of knowledge/understanding of the special education program."* There were several subordinate reasons clustered under this category, including *"The principal sees the special ed tchr as the specially trained expert."* Next, for the same issue area, the stakeholders electronically brainstormed action steps which, if taken, would improve the situation (address the reasons given). The facilitator led the group in sorting the resulting set of actions, developing for each cluster a statement that captured the subordinate action statements. An example of one such inclusive action statement was *"Provide inservice for the administrators."* Finally, each stakeholder electronically voted for six of the action steps they believed would be most effective. The resulting printout listed the six action steps for this issue area that the group had scored highest, sorted by rank sum. The same sequence of activities, undertaken for the second and third issue areas, above, extended the stakeholders' opportunity to reflect on the findings and to address them directly with reasoned action proposals.

Concluding activities of the day used the electronic technology to facilitate the group's formulation of a vision statement, a mission statement, and statements of goals/objectives the group wanted to achieve relative to its vision and mission. As an example of the efficiency of the computer-based group process, the stakeholders formulated and reached consensus on both statements within 45 minutes. The vision statement was *"To provide special education students with the most effective education for satisfying and productive lives."* The mission statement was *"To achieve our vision by promoting the best possible training and support of all educators, thus increasing their professional success, pride, and satisfaction."* Examples of two of the goals/objectives for the vision and mission statements were "Implement effective training programs for teachers and administrators" and "Infuse project data (from the SDSU/AIR study) into the knowledge base of administrators and teachers." The mission and vision statements would guide the group's development of a strategic planning document in the fifth and sixth stakeholder meetings.

Meetings #5 and #6

The fifth and sixth stakeholder meetings were held within about three weeks of each other, utilized the same research summaries, and followed the same sequence of technology-assisted activities to draft a strategic planning document that responded to major study findings under five topic areas: (1) Working Conditions and School Climate; (2) Relationships with Other Teachers At School Site; (3) Relationships with School Administrators; (4) Support, Appreciation, and Participation from Parents; and (5) Inclusive Education Practices and Policies. For each of these target areas, the following sequence of activities was completed to produce that component of the strategic plan. First, the research team reviewed the major study findings for the area. Second, the stakeholders used their computer terminals to propose and vote on goals and objectives to be met by improving policies and practices in the target area. Third, they input their proposals for strategic actions and examples of subordinate activities/tasks (for each strategic action) that should be taken *by each of ten* specified stakeholder groups: State Department of Education, Commission on Teacher Credentialing, State School Board, Advisory Commission on Special Education, California Federation of Teachers/California Teachers Association, the school districts, individual school sites, institutions of higher education (teacher preparation programs), professional organizations (e.g., CEC, CAPSE), and the SELPA Directors/County Offices of Education.

To support this ambitious agenda within the time constraints of these last two strategic planning meetings, the facilitator led the group in the sorts of electronic brainstorming, sorting, voting, and refining activities with which they had become familiar in the four prior stakeholder meetings. In addition, the research team provided the group with supporting material to scan during the electronic exercises. These included summary lists of the objectives, actions, activities, and recommendations they had generated at prior meetings -- these capsule summaries were organized by the same five target areas on which the strategic planning sessions were to focus. In addition, the stakeholders were given a summary of major findings from a special analysis of the *areas associated with special education teacher dissatisfaction reported by leavers and probable leavers;* these findings were listed as statements of their major concerns, and grouped by topic under each of the five target areas. They included only those factors that clustered statistically, i.e., on which leavers and stayers differed significantly. The factors represented one-third of the total items on the survey instrument. The facilitator and the researchers coached the stakeholders to discriminate between goals and objectives, and between strategic approaches and specific activities/tasks, in the ideas that they contributed in the electronic process.

The computer-based product from the strategic planning process was literally produced in these last two meetings, namely, a draft *Strategic Plan for Addressing Issues Relating to Special Education Teacher Satisfaction/Retention/Attrition.* In an outline format it presented the vision statement, mission statement, and the goals, objectives, and recommended strategic actions for each of the five target areas. Within each target area, the outline first presented a goal statement. That was followed by statements of objectives; under each objective were the ten stakeholder groups, each followed by a list of strategic actions (and subordinate activities/tasks for many of these) the group recommended. Thus the document presented five coordinated plans, each representing an inclusive and concerted effort to meet the stated goals and objectives for improvements in the target area.

The computer-based product was prepared as a formal draft strategic plan and submitted to validation reviews by the stakeholders and by additional policy makers for whom strategic roles in achieving the goals and objectives were recommended. Reviewers were asked to comment on the appropriateness and feasibility of the subsets of strategic actions, and the subordinate activities/tasks, that the plan designated for their particular entity. In addition, members of the stakeholder group were asked to recommend editorial changes in the substance and wording of the document. Reviewers were asked to provide reasons for their suggestions, e.g., "Not possible for this group," "This is an activity, not a strategy," "Not of sufficient importance," and so on.

Examples of Action Recommendations in the Strategic Plan

The following excerpt from the draft Strategic Plan is for the first of the five topic areas. The example lists the relevant goal and all subordinate objectives. For one of those objectives, the strategic actions for each of ten stakeholder groups are listed to illustrate the manner in which all of these groups would need to pull together to guarantee a strong, effective response to the problem area addressed by that objective.

Topic #1: Working Conditions/School Climate and Job Design

Goal: Improve daily working conditions, school climate, and job design for purposes of increasing special education teacher satisfaction.

Objective 1-A: Promote increased administrative support and responsiveness to staff needs.
Objective 1-B: Increase professional autonomy.
Objective 1-C: Provide adequate material resources to teachers.
Objective 1-D: Increase opportunities for professional growth of special education teachers.

As an example, here are the strategic actions under Objective 1-C that were recommended by the stakeholder committee for each of ten key groups.

Objective 1-C: Provide adequate material resources to teachers.

Strategic Actions:

California Department of Education
1. Develop mechanisms for funding local curriculum acquisition efforts.
2. Create ways to provide bulk purchases for reduced rates.
3. Disseminate information on effective instructional materials/programs through newsletters and other publications.
4. Develop a strategic plan relative to special education teacher attrition.

Commission on Teacher Credentialing
1. Ensure that selection and evaluation of instructional/materials and programs for use with students with special needs is addressed in all teacher credential programs.

State Board of Education
1. Appoint special education experts to each curriculum area on the Curriculum Commission for the state.
2. Identify/disseminate criteria for evaluating effectiveness of educational materials in relationship to special education.

Advisory Commission on Special Education
1. Study ways of utilizing resources efficiently and effectively, and ways of increasing resources; make recommendations.
2. Promote the establishment of criteria for evaluating effectiveness of educational materials in relationship to special education.
3. Create a committee to make recommendations on meeting resource needs of special education teachers.

California Teachers Association

1. Establish professional standards on selection of materials relative to identified indices of their effectiveness.
2. Ensure that special education needs are represented on professional resource committees of the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC).

Local School Districts

1. Include special education staff in all curriculum selection/dissemination.
2. Develop a materials needs assessment for teachers; inventory materials at each site.
3. Establish guidelines for allocations of materials budgets for *all* teachers, including special education.
4. Use district mentor teacher network to help new teachers find resources.
5. Allow teachers to pool their budgets to buy materials to share.
6. Provide central materials/text/etc. resource center that includes exemplary materials, including those that address special needs (LEP, etc.)

Individual School Sites

1. Provide same level (funding, quality, adequate supply) of texts, workbooks, etc., for general education and special education.
2. Provide adequate classroom materials to support new special education programs on site.
3. Ensure access to general education materials for special education teachers.
4. Provide training for both general and special education on addressing needs of special education and other students at risk for academic failure.

Institutions of Higher Education (Teacher Preparation Programs)

1. Utilize existing mechanisms (e.g., district newsletters) for recommending proven instructional materials.
2. Provide preservice and inservice instruction on evaluating and selecting materials relative to available evidence on their effectiveness in addressing specific needs.

Professional Special Education Organizations (CEC, CAPSE, etc.)

1. Conduct workshops on how to select instructional materials.
2. Establish/disseminate criteria for selecting instructional materials.

SELPA Directors/County Offices of Education

1. Maintain samples of good instructional materials for teacher review.
2. Coordinate/pool local resources to provide workshops on effective instructional materials.

ATTRITION/RETENTION OF URBAN SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS: MULTI-FACETED RESEARCH AND STRATEGIC ACTION PLANNING

FINAL PERFORMANCE REPORT
VOLUME 1

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March 1995

This packet contains:

CHAPTER THREE
A Closer Look at the Decision to Leave Special Education Teaching: Themes and Issues from In-Depth Interviews with Former Teachers

CHAPTER FOUR
Survey Results

CHAPTER 3
A CLOSER LOOK AT THE DECISION TO LEAVE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHING: THEMES AND ISSUES FROM IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH FORMER TEACHERS

A primary goal of the project was to explore in depth the issues that most significantly influence urban special education teachers' decisions to voluntarily leave the field or transfer to a different type of educational position. During the second year of the project we met with a group of teachers who had left special education teaching the past spring and talked at length about their work in the field and the circumstances surrounding their attrition from special education teaching. This chapter presents the results of post-attrition interviews with 17 special educators who left their teaching positions in District 1 during or immediately following the 1991-92 school year.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section overviews the methods used in the interview study. Included is a description of the sample; an explanation of the interview design, guide, and process; and an overview of the data analysis. The second section focuses on three major themes drawn from the interviews. These three themes represent recurrent issues in the stories about leaving as presented by these 17 former special education teachers. The chapter ends with a brief look at several broader observations about the leaving process.

3.1 Methods

3.1.1 The Sample: 1991-92 Teacher Leavers

We defined a teacher leaver as any individual who was working as a special education teacher in District 1 during the 1991-92 school year and was no longer working in that capacity at the start of the subsequent school year. Excluded from this definition were any teachers who were officially listed as on leave of absence. Also excluded were any involuntary leavers, including those who lost their positions as a result of district reduction-in-force actions or teachers who left due to serious health conditions that specifically precluded them from continuing to teach. Based on this definition, the 1991-92 attrition rate for District 1 was 6.4%, reflecting a total of 27 teachers.

Our intent was to include all 27 teacher leavers in the study. However, six relocated and could not be traced. In addition, one teacher declined to participate. As a result, the original sample consisted of 20 1991-92 leavers. During the initial phases of the analysis process, 3 of the 20 were dropped. In two cases, the decision was based on the teachers' brief length of tenure with the district (i.e., less than half of one school year). The third teacher worked in a position where students did not receive services in a school-based setting. The analysis described in this paper, therefore, reflects findings from 17 interviews.

These leavers varied in age and had diverse training and work histories. They were positioned in a wide range of the district's special education programs -- cross-categorical resource, self-contained special classes, and itinerant services; and programs for students with learning, emotional and/or physical disabilities. Career starting points ranged from 1953 to 1990. The careers of some of these teachers were virtually uninterrupted, while others reported taking breaks of up to 15 years, for example, to raise their children. Some of these teachers had worked solely in special education, while others had moved into special education after some years in general education classrooms. One teacher described a career of 36 years spent predominantly in two schools -- one as a fourth grade teacher and the second as a special education resource teacher. In contrast, another former special educator chronicled a 23-year career path that wove in and out of the classroom and various supervisory and semi-administrative assignments and covered bilingual education, counseling, and special education.

A comparison of the interview group with those 1991-92 leavers who were not interviewed (N=10) revealed that the compositions of the two groups were roughly parallel in terms of gender, ethnicity, and school level taught. The interview group tended to be somewhat more experienced, however. In fact, only 1 of 17 teachers interviewed could be considered a beginning teacher (i.e., in the first three years of teaching), and only 2 could be considered beginning special education teachers.

Table 3.1.1 summarizes the post-attrition employment status of the 17 leavers who made up the interview group. Roughly one third were retirees, with ages ranging from 56-64. Of the 11 remaining leavers, 9 continued working in the district, seven transferred into general education positions and 2 into non-teaching special education assignments.

Table 3.1.1
Interview Sample: Current Employment Status

In District	
General Education, Teaching	7
Special Education, Non-Teaching	2
Outside of District	
Private Speech Therapy	1
Unemployed	1
Retired	6

In keeping with the differences in experience noted above, the interview group included a somewhat higher proportion of retirees (N=6 of 17) than did the non-interviewed group (N=1 of 10). A second contrast was evident in employment status with the district. With the obvious exception of the retirees, 9 of 11 members of the interview group were still employed in the district, while all but one of the members of the non-interview group left the district at the end of the 1991-92 school year.

3.1.2 The In-depth Interview

Interview Design

The interview study design was heavily influenced by our belief that a teacher's decision to make a career change or a significant shift in career focus (i.e., a shift from special education to general education) is related in important ways to factors stemming from a teacher's recent or current personal and professional circumstances, as well as the collection of experiences stemming from their career history and personal biography. In order to keep our work scope manageable, however, we limited our focus to teachers' professional and personal experiences stemming from the period of their career.

We assumed that the decision to leave special education teaching would be greatly influenced by a variety of interacting personal and professional factors taking shape during the career, including a teacher's goals, values, interests, and the extent to which those are recognized and shared by the organization; the content and focus of a teacher's initial training program, as well as the cumulative effect of subsequent professional development opportunities and on-the-job experiences; professional expectations and the extent to which those are met over time; the balance struck between the demands of an individual's personal and professional life; satisfaction with working relationships and other working conditions; and levels of support, encouragement, professional treatment, and reward received.

We specifically sought to understand how teachers' prior work experiences and, to some extent, their personal circumstances, influenced their current experiences as special educators and ultimately their decisions to leave their jobs. We paid particular attention to unresolved conflicts and sources of disappointment, unmet expectations, and/or unrealized professional aspirations.

We believed that these teachers' experiences would be better understood if communicated with as much explanatory and contextual detail as possible, so we sought ways to solicit unrestricted streams of thought, feeling, and perception from teachers. Methods appropriate for gathering such data were those associated with qualitative inquiry, specifically in-depth interviews, structured to elicit information through story.

The Interview Guide and Process

The interview guide and process were influenced by a review of literature in the areas of teaching as work and career, with specific emphasis, whenever possible, on the work of special educators. We were particularly influenced by the work of Cohn & Kottkamp (1993), Goodson (1992), Hargreaves & Fullan (1992); Huberman (1992; 1989), Johnson (1990); Rosenholtz (1990); Yee (1990); Huberman & Prick (1989), and Lortie (1975).

Rather than attempting to structure responses, the interview protocol was designed to guide teachers in revealing their experiences through story. Specific questions were used to help teachers reflect on broad topical areas (see Table 3.1.2). The interviews were conducted by Gillman and Morvant. We met with each teacher in person, taking two to three hours to complete each interview. With the permission of these teachers, all interviews were tape recorded.

Table 3.1.2
Broad Areas Covered in the Interview

- Job history
- Entry into the field of special education
- Initial and evolving expectations
- Positive aspects of the work experience
- Negative aspects of the work experience
- Leaving special education teaching
- Work opportunities at the time of leaving
- Suggestions/recommendations for adjustments in the work

Documenting the Job History. Each interview started by reviewing the teacher's work history. Teachers were asked to list and describe all of the jobs they had held since college, providing "snapshot" descriptions of the positions or organizations, dates of employment, and brief explanations for their decisions to leave each job. When a position was education-related, we inquired into the levels and categories of students served and the program or service delivery type. We recorded these histories on job history forms (see Exhibit A) which were then used as reference documents for both teachers and interviewers during the interview to assist in stimulating memory and grounding teachers' experiences in time. We let the teacher determine the pace of the job history portion of the interview, allowing each individual to warm up at his or her own pace. If the process stimulated a discussion of other issues relevant to the broader inquiry, we let the interview move in that direction, always coming back to the job history until it was complete.

Exhibit A
Employment History Form

Position Title	Location (district, school, or organization)	**Level of students**	**Category of students**	**Program type/ service model**	Duration: From To	Why did you leave?

Exploring Career Experiences. Subsequently, the interview explored selected aspects of the teachers' professional career and experiences, following a modified *critical incident* approach. For instance, we asked teachers to identify particular periods during their career which stood out as "most enjoyable." In doing so, we asked teachers to describe these times and what they felt contributed to them, and we encouraged teachers to give as many illustrative examples from the time as possible.

Likewise, when we asked teachers to describe times in their careers in which they felt least effective, we asked for examples or stories which would most fully illustrate the circumstances. If any change in a teacher's feelings was noted over time, we probed factors that may have influenced the change.

One objective of our interview design was to let the teachers determine the extent to which they spoke about a given topic, allowing them to bring up or discuss topics of importance to them without our prompting. If, however, we noticed that a teacher's responses tended to reflect work-related issues over non-work-related issues or vice versa, we carefully probed into the undiscussed domain to provide an opportunity for teachers to consider a broader range of issues.

For example, if when discussing a period of dissatisfaction with work, a teacher continued to exclusively cite personal influences, we asked if there were any things about the school or district that may have also contributed to their dissatisfaction. If on the other hand a teacher's responses tended to focus more heavily on work-related influences, we asked to what extent the teacher felt family or personal issues contributed to his or her experience.

The interview also explored the factors that influenced teachers' decisions to leave special education teaching. We asked teachers to describe what they saw as leading up to the decision, to give us examples of incidents that could illustrate the circumstances, and to describe how these circumstances contributed to their leaving. We gave teachers as much time as they needed to fully explain their decisions.

3.1.3 Data Analysis

Analysis proceeded in stages, starting with a detailed examination of each teacher's individual story, then moving on to a search for themes that recurred across multiple stories.

Individual Teacher Portraits

A primary goal in conducting the analysis was to preserve the integrity of each leaver's story. To this end, we first constructed a portrait of each teacher drawn from the interview material. The portrait provided a means of condensing some 40 to 50 pages of transcribed material into a more manageable document, while also organizing the story both temporally and thematically.

Each portrait included a tabular summary of the career history of the teacher. For every job or assignment held throughout the career, the table listed the position title, employing organization, program type or service model, disability categories, grade level of students, start and ending dates, and a brief summary of reasons for leaving. In addition, the narrative material was loosely organized to highlight:

- the circumstances surrounding the individual's *entry into the field;*
- specifics of the teacher's *career progression*; and
- the teacher's account of the final *decision to leave* special education teaching.

The portraits also summarized teachers' retrospective assessments of their attrition decisions and feelings about their employment status at the time of the interview. Additionally, we noted any evidence of interaction between personal and work-related factors in the stories.

Each portrait was, to a large extent, unique. The exact outline of an individual's portrait was shaped by the content of that teacher's interview. Material was organized around the major themes or threads that wove through the individual's career story. For this portion of the analysis, we used Hyperqual (Padilla, 1991; Tesch, 1992), a software program that facilitates coding and manipulation of narrative data.

As much as possible, the final portraits reflected the words of the teachers. Our commentary was designed primarily to summarize major sections and smooth transitions.

These portraits became the foundation for all subsequent analyses. As we began to search for broader patterns and themes across the 17 interviews, we continuously returned to the portraits to ground our interpretation in the context of the individual stories that contributed to each theme.

Thematic Analysis: Factors Linked to the Decision to Leave

The thematic analysis focused on factors which appeared most strongly to influence teachers' decisions to leave special education teaching in the district. Drawing primarily from the portraits, we sought to identify factors that individual teachers had directly linked to the leaving decision, as well as any other major themes judged by the research team to have significantly influenced the teacher's decision.

Because we did not ask teachers to provide running lists of all their reasons for leaving, but rather to tell us stories that reflected the culmination of their experiences over time, we found it necessary at times to draw our understanding from the broader interview. For example, if a teacher experienced a series of profound disappointments or difficulties over an extended period of time prior to leaving, *and if these disappointments appeared strongly related to issues raised as reasons for leaving*, we factored these experiences into the leaving story, whether explicitly linked by the teacher or not.

As the process of identifying factors and major explanatory themes proceeded, instances of similarities across stories became evident. We noticed, for example, that clusters of teachers reported similar experiences with the central office administration or faced similar difficulties in trying to manage their changing caseloads. We kept a written list of these common experiences, describing them in as much detail as possible and noting any hypotheses about their relevance, particularly in terms of understanding attrition.

As this list grew, it was continually reorganized and refined. For example, we created new categories when specifics of an individual story failed to fit existing categories. Conversely, when common themes were observed within stories filed under two or more separate categories, we combined the information into a broader, more inclusive single category. Our goal was to identify the minimum number of categories *that would accurately and comprehensively represent each teacher's story*.

3.2 Results:
Factors That Influence Attrition Decisions:
Themes From The Interviews

In looking across these interviews, we were struck by the wide range of emotion reflected in the leaving stories of these 17 former special education teachers. At one end of the continuum, a veteran teacher discussed her sense of grief as she began her transition into retirement after a highly satisfying career. At the other end, we spoke to teachers who, after early- to mid-career resignations, were coming to terms with heightened feelings of bitterness and disappointment in their work experiences as special educators in District 1.

A similar level of complexity was evident when looking at the individual stories of each leaver. Each interview provided support for the conclusion that the decision to leave a job or to change careers is rarely simple. In no case did a single factor fully explain a teacher's leaving decision. In each case, the decision was based on an interaction of multiple factors.

There were several themes raised consistently by a majority of teachers in this cohort -- themes they clearly identified as contributing factors in their decision to leave special education teaching. The stories of these leavers revealed concerns about:

- job design;
- the nature of their relations with the central office; and
- the professional and/or personal fit of their special education teaching assignment.

3.2.1 Job Design

> *Every organization has ways of balancing out the many demands for its time, attention, resources, and energy. Depending on the balance that is struck, the system performs and delivers certain results. Think of this balancing act as design. Design is not just structure. It is not always formal or conscious. This balancing of resources isn't always fixed — you may not do things the same way every time, and your results may vary (even drastically!) from month to month. But, . . . the fact that certain results occur (and not others) verifies that some design has been perfectly executed.* (Hanna, 1988, p. 39)

Since the passage of The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (E.H.A.) in the mid 70s, through the period of the Regular Education Initiative in the 80s, and on to the current focus on inclusion, the field of special education has been gradually but consistently undergoing massive changes. For students in special education, these changes have meant movement from separate special schools to mainstream campuses, from geographically organized special programs in distant schools to enrollment in their neighborhood schools, and from self-contained special classes to general education classrooms.

Such shifts, especially the current movement to integrate special education programs and students, have propelled marked changes in the work roles and responsibilities of many special education teachers. A key consideration is the extent to which the special education teacher's job, as it is currently designed, is capable of handling the new requirements of the work.

Job design can be viewed as the set of structures, systems, and processes through which work is conducted. Included are the particular ways in which people are organized to perform work, the relationship between time and work demands, organizational decision-making processes, and systems for sharing information.

At a basic level, the adequacy of a job's design is a function of the degree to which the structure or processes established for doing the work facilitate the successful completion of assigned tasks and responsibilities. In some cases, the way work is structured -- such as the way it is staffed, scheduled, and generally organized -- actually inhibits its efficient and effective completion. For an organization, this results in failure to achieve valued goals. For an individual, it results in frustration and work-related stress, which in turn could lead to employee attrition.

When we asked these teachers to describe times during their careers when they felt least effective, the vast majority didn't have to look back that far; they often pointed to the two- to three-year period leading up to their final days in special education. Many indicated that it had become increasingly difficult for them to meet the needs of their students and that their waning sense of efficacy played a major role in their decisions to leave special education teaching. It was clear that the difficulties these teachers were experiencing were a reflection, at least in part, of the evolution of their job responsibilities and the perceived adequacy of the current job design for meeting the challenges presented by the emerging special education paradigm.

We did not conduct a systematic study of the work design of these 17 special educators. Rather, we listened to and documented what teachers expressed about the barriers they faced in performing their work, particularly when these barriers were tied to their decisions to leave special education teaching. Through these conversations, we gained insight into a number of design problems.

Time and time again teachers reported feeling that they were not able to conduct the work the way that *they believed they were trained and hired to do it.* In most cases, the issues for these teachers were not their own levels of preparation for the specific tasks that made up their jobs, but the mechanisms, or designs, through which they had to work.

Based on the work of Hanna (1988), we have labeled those design elements which emerged as highly problematic for this group of leavers as work structure, information systems, and decision-making processes. Each is discussed below.

3.2.2 Work Structure

From the perspectives of many of the 17 leavers with whom we spoke, the ways in which their work was structured, both in terms of the human resource arrangements employed and the balances struck between time and work demands, were inadequate for meeting the challenges presented by the district's efforts to integrate special education.

Reflecting trends in the broader field of special education, the special education programs in District 1 had been undergoing significant review and revision, with a primary aim being the increased integration of students with special needs. While a few categorical programs still existed in the district, the reported direction was toward increased use of multi- and even non-categorical student groupings. The composition of special education caseloads was also being influenced by a marked increase in the numbers of students with multiple and/or more challenging disabilities, including children with significant behavior and emotional needs, many the result of fetal drug or alcohol addictions. As one administrator explained, "We're constantly being faced with more challenging kids, and kids that require more services...which impacts our programs and impacts the teachers."

Self-contained special classes in District 1 were gradually being phased out in favor of more part-time, flexible service arrangements that allowed maximal inclusion of students with special needs into general education settings and programs. Simultaneously, the district was increasingly attempting to place students with special needs in their neighborhood schools rather than bus them to more centrally located special education programs.

The district's newest special education program -- the non-categorical services (NS) model – represented the convergence of all of these trends. This program also reflected a growing concern about the failure of the educational system to adequately address the needs of the "gray area" students, those who were struggling in school but had failed to qualify for special education services.

Following a one-year pilot and a two-year phase-in, an NS program had recently been established at each school building in District 1. In all cases, the NS program was the major service delivery model available in a given school, and in many cases it was the only special education program at a school site. As such, a single NS caseload might well include students from a variety of special education eligibility categories representing an even wider range of instructional strengths and needs.

The emphasis of the NS program was on maximal inclusion of students with special needs in general education settings. Beyond simply scheduling these students into combinations of general and special education classes, NS teachers were encouraged to facilitate the integration of the students by bringing special services to the general education classroom whenever possible -- working individually with groups of students and/or co-teaching with the general educator. Success of the model was dependent upon increased communication and collaboration between the special educator and the individual classroom teachers who were also providing instruction to students with special needs.

In describing recent changes in service delivery models within the district, many of the leavers spoke of a dissonance between the ideal and the real. As before, *the central issue was the extent to which these teachers perceived work structure as promoting or inhibiting equitable student gains in an increasingly complex instructional environment.* Reflecting her philosophical support for the new direction, coupled with skepticism about its feasibility, one teacher spoke for many of her colleagues when she said: "The idea..., idealistically, is good. But when you begin to work it out, there are too many complications. In order for it to work, there has to be more time or more teachers."

In looking across the 17 interviews, it was clear that these various innovations could not be viewed as separate and distinct; rather, they were intricately interwoven. For example, the goal of working in general education classrooms to facilitate successful inclusion of students became more challenging in the context of an increasingly diverse student caseload. The goal of planning collaboratively with classroom teachers placed an even heavier demand on the teacher's daily schedule when coupled with the reality of growing paperwork demands.

Yet, as each teacher reflected on his or her experiences, certain aspects of the work emerged as central to the story. These teachers spoke particularly about challenges stemming from: (1) the changing composition of their student caseloads, (2) the complexity of scheduling instructional time, (3) the increased emphasis on providing consultative services to classroom teachers; and (4) rapidly expanding paperwork responsibilities.

Concerns about Changing Student Caseloads. For many special education teachers, both the change in the types of students enrolled in the district and the move away from self-contained classrooms meant a measurable increase in the severity of needs of their students. Further, as some of these students were integrated into general education classrooms for part of the day, the teacher assistant assigned to the special education program was often pulled to follow the student and assist with integration. *This left the special educator faced with a more challenging caseload composition, but without the support of an instructional assistant.* As one administrator acknowledged, "Seventeen students in NS is workable with a teacher assistant. But seventeen kids with more severe needs and no assistant is not."

One teacher working in a self-contained classroom for students labeled "learning disabled" talked at length about the increasingly severe behavioral needs of the students being placed in her classroom. This teacher was confident that she had the skills to work with each of these students individually, but she was concerned about the challenge presented by the group as a whole. Thus, caseload diversity, rather than class size or severity, was the more pressing issue. *The question was how one teacher, with support from a part-time instructional assistant, might simultaneously meet the individual needs of such a diverse group of students.*

> I've worked with severely disturbed kids like Newt before, but you can't give him to me along with one that sets fires and one that's bringing screwdrivers and trying to slice kids throats on the playground. They have me in a regular elementary school with one aide, and I have 14 kids. I had a child that was autistic. And the one that really was so hostile he was taking my autistic child and trying to stick his hands in a fan. And I also had some kids that were LD, and I said either let those poor kids go somewhere and get their academic service, and if you want me to have these more severe kids, I can have them, but it's not fair to the others, the few straight LDs that I had to be dealing with this.

A colleague across town worked in a cross-categorical resource setting. Some level of student diversity had always been the norm in resource rooms. This diversity was typically addressed through scheduling: students with mild disabilities spent less time in the special setting and more time in general education classes, while the reverse was true for students with more severe needs. The movement to non-categorical services, coupled with the gradual elimination of self-contained programs, had resulted in a significant increase in the diversity of this teacher's caseload. Although a full-time instructional assistant was assigned to assist her, the assistant was often pulled out to work with students who were being integrated into general education classrooms.

> Prior to the change, our most severe students were in self-contained classes, and those students that really needed to be with a special ed teacher were. And those students who were able to be helped and integrated into the regular program were with the resource teachers. After we changed to cross-categorical, however, we had those severe students with us half a day. And so I became more like a self-contained teacher. I had very severe students half a day and multiply handicapped students -- students who required a tremendous amount of my time and attention. I was not able to help those students who were mildly handicapped who could have been brought up to grade level . . . I wasn't able to do that, because my energies were going to working with these very severe students. In addition, I had two languages to deal with.
>
> I couldn't do any grouping whatsoever. There were different handicapping conditions, seven different grade levels, and two different languages.

For both teachers, recent caseload changes in the context of the existing work structure presented a direct threat to their sense of efficacy. As one teacher put it: "You start apologizing for what you knew you could do. You can't see any progress. That's what you're there for."

The Increased Complexity Of Scheduling Instruction. For those teachers striving to increase the integration of their students, scheduling was a major issue. This scheduling problem played out at two levels. First, the special educator needed to negotiate an individual schedule for each child that reflected the appropriate balance of general education instruction and special education support services.

Then the special educator needed to combine the special education portions of these respective student schedules and construct a feasible instructional schedule for the resource room. The task was challenging enough to begin with, but was made even more difficult by unpredictable adjustments in the schedules of individual classroom teachers, a host of itinerant related services specialists, or even the school as a whole. A teacher working in a resource setting for students with physical disabilities referred to herself as an FAA agent: "I was in charge of directing -- just fly here, fly there." She described her work this way:

> Well, it's just so scattered. I tried to do what each kid needed, I tried to touch on that area and it's just too much. There was just a lot of times I couldn't make it in here. There are special programs, or the therapist was out on a certain date—could she have that kid right at the time that I was going to finally get to work with that kid? Could she see him then? And it's like—well, she's here once a week, and I always [said], "okay, go, go, go, go." And still trying to give them what I thought they needed whenever I could jump on them.

From the perspective of a number of the leavers with whom we spoke, the work became even more complex when the special educator attempted to deliver special instruction in the general education classroom, a stated goal of the district's new NS program. *The comments of two NS teachers illustrate the tensions between competing work requirements and available time.*

> I tried real hard for two years, but I failed to get in and do the collaborative model that they're all talking about doing with the teachers. You can't schedule with the teacher when they've got to go to computer lab and AIDS instruction or sex ed. It's a scheduling nightmare. You're constantly the one that had to juggle the schedule in order to get into the classroom.

> It's an idealistic situation, and I can't see it working. If I have children from three different classrooms and two different grades, they can come together and form a group. And I can work with them in a short time period and accomplish something. But now, with [the new model] I am supposed to go to these individual rooms. Now where in an hour can I go to three different rooms and accomplish anything?

The Expectation for Meaningful Teacher-to-Teacher Collaboration. Meaningful collaboration between special and general educators is intended to serve as both the foundation and the framework for ensuring that an appropriate education is provided to each student with special needs. Yet, sufficient planning time was not available to these teachers, *primarily because existing work demands had not been modified or redistributed in any way.* As one teacher put it: "To collaborate with the teacher -- to get carryover -- you need time with the teacher. And there isn't that time. It's not built in. Your caseload hasn't gone down; you still have to service the same number of kids." The result was that teachers had to try to squeeze the time for this central activity into an already packed day:

> Virtually the only time I could meet with teachers was lunch. I don't know if you know what teachers are like at lunch? There's barely time to go to the bathroom and eat your lunch and get your wits together and make essential

> phone calls. There's no way you can really effectively interface with teachers at lunch. So, it was almost impossible for me to find enough time to spend with one teacher, let alone all of them.

This special educator's comments point to the importance of laying the groundwork necessary to ensure innovations can have a chance to succeed. Attention must be given to basic logistics surrounding increased instructional interdependence between special and general educators.

Expanded Paperwork Responsibilities. As expected, we found that the non-instructional parts of the job were definitely a source of stress for many of these teachers — with particular emphasis on growing paperwork demands.

Some teachers spoke of the sheer volume of paperwork and administrative tasks they were being required to complete. Several veteran teachers observed that the paperwork load had increased significantly since they began teaching. According to these teachers, *paperwork demands and other non-instructional tasks which generate it, such as testing and meetings, had grown to require significantly more time than a teacher had in normal working hours.* One veteran remarked: "Little did I know that in 30 years [the paperwork] would increase 30-fold! I was working from 6:45 in the morning, and I was always trying to leave the building by dark." This concern was echoed by her colleagues:

> You don't only have to test 'em. You have to write up your results. But, before you ever do it, you have to get all these permission forms signed and all the referrals and the request for services—and the paperwork . . . gets worse every year. And then test, write up the results, get all the paperwork ready for the first conference, notify all the other people that have to sit in on that. And then you have your professional conference, and then you have to have another one where the parent comes. And it just goes on and on. And you have paperwork for every one of these conferences.

> I expected there was a lot of paperwork. . . . but then it has surprised me how it has increased over the years . . . And I know, going around to several different schools now — special ed teachers are so overwhelmed with it, and it's just worse, more and more and more.

Non-instructional tasks were seen as a threat to instructional time. Teachers felt the way the work was organized actually set up competing priorities: attention to one was at the expense of the other. One teacher asked rhetorically: "Do you want me to do it, or do you want me just to spend all my time writing about it?" Two others echoed her concern:

> You spend one day a week as an elementary special ed teacher handling paper. You don't teach. You handle paperwork and you test; you write IEPs; you have meetings. I think they could probably train educational assistants to do a lot of it.

> I work with children. And I said, heck with the paperwork. I'd rather do activities in the classroom, or work with small groups, or even work with discipline problems or whatever. But I didn't like filling out all the umpteen [forms]. I wanted to spend my time with the children, with students—versus doing paperwork.

Some teachers felt that many of these non-instructional tasks were irrelevant to their instructional work, neither serving their original purpose nor used by their intended audiences. In fact, one former special education teacher noted that, while paperwork was somewhat more extensive in her new position, she did not resent it as much because it was more directly tied to her daily lessons with students.

Others described feeling frustrated or even insulted that their education and training were being squandered on tasks so clerical in nature. These teachers felt the clerical elements should be delegated to clerical support staff, or the entire task should be streamlined or computerized:

> I was working 60 hours a week and at least probably 45 hours of that was just blasted paperwork and assessment in class of the kids and all the stuff that went with that. And it just got to be too much. I mean, I was trained to teach — not to be a secretary. And so, that's why I got out of it. Pure and simple.

> We had to photocopy for everyone of those kids, a copy for the cum, a copy for the special ed folder, and a copy for the regional office. That's three copies of this. And some of these pages, mind you, are like—well all of them are at least two pages in length, 'cause you've got to have a cover sheet, you've got to have what the assessment was that you've used in the instructions. So we had to photocopy all those, and send them. You've got to do it twice a year! Now to me that's a lot of waste of time for somebody who has an education, to stand and xerox, 60, 100, about 200 copies. I thought, this job is not what I was trained to do. If they want it done, send out somebody that's going to xerox it.

> I think once I counted, and we have to write the students' identifying information—name, date, birth, matrix number, address, parents' names, grade, teacher—at the top of about 30 forms. And it could have been . . . streamlined . . . They could get that part of our work down to nothing, if they just would eliminate the duplication and get the crucial information.

A few teachers reported bringing paperwork home or trying to squeeze it into meetings or classroom hours. In order to cope, others simply looked for ways to cut corners:

> The way I coped with it was, if I had just too much to do, I would—this is probably not legal—I would put the kids in class and try to do what I had to do.

> Well, was I 100% in compliance? Oh, you bet! Did I fabricate everything? Oh, you bet!

For those teachers who felt they could neither compromise nor do an adequate job, the anxiety and/or resentment were especially high:

> I was dealing with a lot of paperwork and a lot of timelines and had to send these papers here and there. Well, I found that was definitely . . . not becoming my forte. I could evaluate and all that. I was having trouble with papers. Like everybody else, I like to do a good job. I like to have that satisfaction at the end of the day that I've done things well. And if I'm still thinking about where is that paper, you know, it worries you, it worried me tremendously.

> And I resented it all the time . . . I was conscientious . . . I went above and beyond what I needed to do . . . And I just got bitter towards the special ed department when they would sit there in their little offices and send us this little [compliance] report card type thing . . . I didn't want that crap. . . . Someone's sitting there, judging you by papers that they have in their hand . . .

Teachers often did not fully understand the requirements, let alone the rationale behind them. Further, *given the reality of a finite block of time, these tasks were perceived as a real threat to attainment of the teacher's most valued goal – student learning*.

3.3.3 Information Sharing Systems

How information flows through an organization greatly impacts individuals' work experience, especially in times of change. Hanna (1994) emphasized that in productive organizations, information systems are designed "primarily to provide information to the point of action and problem solving," in contrast to more traditional organizations, "which provide information based on hierarchical channels . . . "

Stories from a few veteran teachers in the district suggested ways in which information sharing may have changed in the district as it grew larger and more bureaucratic over time. Their testimonies were consistent with research on the evolution of organizations, which posits that as organizations (such as a district's special education division) grow and mature, knowledge and information tend to become more centralized. One veteran teacher echoed the voices of several in her discussion of this shift.

> One of the problems is that none of us really know what the guidelines are any more. I don't know what qualifies anybody any more. I got to the point where I didn't even know what they were working with to make their decisions. I mean, *I used to* --and now I don't know what the district's guidelines are for placement, what they are for category, what the different programs mean.
>
> In the past, the teachers always had hands-on, and we were highly knowledgeable --in fact, we'd have in-services, they'd *want* the teachers to stay current and knowledgeable. But in recent years it got to the point where I couldn't even keep track of who qualified for what.

Several teacher leavers expressed concerns with the limited amount of information they received or the extent to which the district promoted opportunities for information exchange between teachers and their colleagues, particularly for the purposes of managing changes taking place in their work. As a result, they felt inadequately prepared to make decisions or provide appropriate services for students.

One teacher whose position had recently changed from traditional resource to non-categorical services with integrated instruction reported: "It was like a whole new job. They changed the way we were delivering services and our role changed totally." She went on to recall her sense of frustration with the information void that followed implementation of the new non-categorical model:

> I don't think they ever asked for feedback about their new model. We had a very nice in-service on the consultation model and how to work with teachers. It was very helpful.
>
> But there was no follow-through on that. There were not follow-through meetings. There were meetings about specific concerns like, you know, mainstreaming and maintaining behaviors in the classroom. But we never were brought together to talk, to even share our feelings or talk about common problems and how to implement them.
>
> And I think it would have helped us to get together because, when I got to the school I was at last year, they had a really effective way of doing it that was much better than what I had tried myself, and it would have helped me to have heard them discuss how they were doing it.

3.3.4 Decision-Making Processes

In successful workplaces, workers, managers, and staff specialists achieve a partnership through learning together, bringing skills, expertise, information and mutual support to economic and technical problems. There will always be a certain class of "real-time" information and expertise among workers, specialists and managers that can be accessed only through joint discussion and mutual learning. This is notably evident under conditions of uncertainty and fast change. (Weisbord, 1987, p. 64)

Along with the centralization of information comes the centralization of control. For many of these teachers, the two went hand-in-hand. In describing her lack of current knowledge of eligibility criteria in the district, one teacher remarked: "It is like some big secret. They [the central office] will tell you whether a kid qualifies or not!"

These teachers' stories reflected a wide range of concerns about their perceived lack of involvement in key decisions that directly affected their work. At a basic level, one teacher spoke about her request for materials and equipment to support her instructional program. The first response was "no" due to lack of funds. The items were finally ordered, but she was left out of the decision . In her opinion, the materials and equipment supplied to her classroom addressed neither her original request nor her students' needs.

Two other teachers described their frustration at being separated from important decisions around curriculum selection and instructional philosophy in the district. Both were proponents of phonics, and had reservations about the whole-language method for teaching reading to students with disabilities. They were frustrated that the central office dictated a method of instruction, and particularly that it dictated a single approach for all students. One teacher described it this way:

> [The district is] saying, "This is THE way you must teach now. ...I feel you have to know what's been used, what's available. And then, you have to draw the best from each of these programs and put them together to fit the child. Some children need phonics. Some children don't. I don't say you have to stand up there and teach everybody phonics. But some children need it. They should have the opportunity to learn those skills then.

A lack of involvement in decision making around student placements was a significant theme for a number of teachers. As previously mentioned, changes in caseload composition were creating serious repercussions for many special educators.

Some teachers with longer tenure in the field remembered a time when they had been active members of the placement team, integrally involved in decisions about student placement. In contrast, they reported that these decisions were now made at the district level by administrators and supervisors, and they often only learned about a new placement when the student arrived at the classroom door. Beyond its day-to-day impact on their classroom, such lack of involvement in placement decisions represented for some teachers an implied lack of confidence in, and devaluing of, their professional opinions:

> It just seems like that special ed teachers have to follow rules that are dictated by people, maybe the program specialists and . . . the administrators who are in a service center apart from the school. Maybe they are following a higher demand that's coming from somewhere, I don't know that.
>
> But I know that my word has no clout whatsoever. That I can be easily overridden by people in administrative positions, people who have never met the child. And that was very upsetting to me. And I always got the feeling, too, that when I recommended a placement for a child, whether it be more restrictive placement, or-- Usually when I recommended a more restrictive placement I always felt that the people who were supposed to be on my team were feeling like I wanted to get this child out of my class, that I wanted to get rid of a behavior problem. And that was really upsetting to me, too, because I consider myself to be a professional, and that's not my way.

Finally, one teacher described her experience with school-based management, a movement founded on principles of collaborative decision-making. For this teacher, implementation of the site-based model at her school was a far cry from authentic involvement for teachers:

> I suppose in an ideal situation it could work, but it just wasted all our time and we weren't having any input into anything, it was just a total farce. We weren't able to make decisions — we weren't given decision-

> making power. *We weren't empowered at all to do anything, we were just ordered to sit through more meetings and listen to people talk.*

The perceptions of a number of these leavers were reflected in the comments of one when she placed teachers squarely at the bottom on the decision-making hierarchy: "This whole district is too big. ...They hand their directives down to people, who hand them down to other people, who hand them down. And by the time things get to us--"

3.4 Central Office -Teacher Relations

Most teachers interviewed raised concerns with one or more aspects of their relationship with the central office administration, and many linked those concerns to their decisions to leave special education teaching. Teachers didn't limit their focus to "administrative support," or lack thereof — language which has become commonplace in the literature and other discussions of teachers' work. Rather, teachers discussed a more extensive range of issues, and in doing so, provided a fuller illustration of the complex nature of central office-teacher relations.

The interviews exposed several patterns of interaction between teachers and central office staff, including frequency and purpose of contact, and the effects of these patterns on teachers' work experiences. In addition, teachers discussed the extent to which they felt that their efforts were recognized and valued by the central office. We refer to the latter as "perceived support," first defined by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, and Sowa (1986) as an employee's perception of being valued and cared about by his or her organization. Over half of the teachers indicated that some or all of their special education administrators were guided by organizational values and/or priorities that were in conflict with their own. These perceptions were typically based on teachers' own assessments of administrative actions or decisions made over time.

3.4.1 Perceived Distance from Administration

In a study of organizational communication and relationships, Ray (1991) asserted that supportive ties are characterized by "depth, breadth, and a shared definition of the relationship" (p. 92) — qualities stemming largely from patterns of communication between individuals. Ray contended that as the information base that individuals share grows in depth and breadth, so too will the potential for greater trust due to an expanded basis on which individuals can accurately predict another's behavior. In order for relationship depth to develop, Ray (1991) argued that strong communication links, determined by greater frequency of interaction, are necessary.

Many teachers reported that they had little to no contact with their special education administrators while employed as special educators for the district. Some teachers said that, after several years of employment, they had not even met many key central office staff.

> I didn't feel supported, because I didn't even know who these people were. I mean, you know, I had never met them, I had spoken to them over the phone, but I feel it's important for your superiors to become familiar with their employees.

Lack of contact was problematic for teachers because they perceived that the central office held considerable decision-making power over issues that directly affected their work. Teachers believed that judgements or decisions being made about their work were not adequately informed due to low levels of administrative contact and exposure to their day-to-day routines and caseloads. This sense of being managed from a distance left many teachers feeling misunderstood, undervalued, and powerless to effect change. As one teacher put it, "the special education teachers' hands are tied, they can do nothing, because they have to answer to people that never see children all day long and yet make significant decisions for them." One teacher spoke of her frustration when receiving feedback from a central office staff member who had never visited her classroom and was unfamiliar with it.

> One of the head people from special ed wanted to come out and see me and bring some material. This person suggested things that would really be insulting to my students if I gave it to them. And I was insulted because I thought, "You question my knowledge and you have never been out here before. You don't even know what I'm doing. You haven't sat in on my classroom, and you're telling me what to do, when you have no knowledge at all of what my classroom and my students are, and what I'm doing with them. It was just sort of mind-boggling to me, it really was. In fact, I really had to keep the tears away that day.

Ray (1991) also talked about the importance of expanding "communication breadth," and cited types of information that, if shared, may expand breadth and serve to reinforce supportive ties. These included job-related communication or discussion of job performance; social and personal concerns, defined as informal friendly communication and non-work related talk; and communication regarding innovation, that is, new ideas and new ways of doing things related to the job.

In contrast, many of the teachers we spoke with raised concerns about the narrow range of issues addressed in their dealings with central office staff. For example, teachers indicated that administrators focused, for the most part, on *monitoring their work* or unilaterally implementing quick-fix solutions to problems rather than on *proactively providing assistance* or coaching to help them successfully accomplish their work.

> I feel that they do not know what we do or care what we do — unless there's parents bitching. And then all of a sudden they just want to settle the conflict. They don't care what's going on, just settle it. I just don't feel like we're 'together for children.' So the teachers try hard. But you can't do it if you don't have support all the way up.

One teacher captured the feelings of several when she claimed that the central office was "like the police out there to make sure that I didn't qualify anybody who didn't meet the strict standards of the district." Another simply felt at a loss for what the role of the central office really was.

> I'm coming down hard on them, I guess, because I really never got a handle on what they were supposed to do (referring to program specialists and central office staff). They certainly didn't help me. At all! You know?

Further, many teachers spoke at length about their innovations in teaching and/or program design. Often these achievements, as perceived by the teacher, were based on long-term, self-initiated efforts. With frequency, teachers reported dissatisfaction with the amount of recognition they received for such work, often making statements to the effect that "nobody even noticed."

3.4.2 Perceived Support

Eisenberger et al. (1986) defined perceived organizational support as an employee's perception of being valued and cared about by his or her organization. The concept involves an employee's trust that his/her effort will be noticed and rewarded. Employees who perceive positive support are more likely to incorporate organizational membership into their self-identity (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990).

Teachers most often expressed frustration with the extent to which they felt their efforts were recognized and valued by the central office. For example, several teachers felt that their administrators rewarded them for meeting legal requirements yet paid little attention to their successes with students.

> We would get reinforced for completing our IEPs by certain dates, and it didn't matter if I had gotten 13 kids out of the self-contained in the past three years. They never recognized that. But it was, "All right, Sara, get all your paperwork done!" But it wasn't, "See, Johnny's making it, he's getting Cs and Bs in high school, in the regular class." You'd hear that from a social worker. But administration as a whole, no. They didn't really recognize that.

While teachers often talked about their paperwork responsibilities as a source of frustration, some also talked at length about going the extra mile to get it done on time, with attention to quality. Teachers reported feeling that even these efforts were not recognized or appreciated by the central office if compliance rates were not met at 100%.

> And I resented it all the time that I had my IEPs because I would try to have my IEPs way ahead of time. I was conscientious. I went above and beyond what I needed to do, you know. I made sure everyone knew way ahead of time when I was going to have an IEP planned so that they could start getting their act together. Which, you know, teachers do, but I would make them reminders and then do additional

> reminders on that. And I just got bitter towards the special ed department when they would sit there in their little offices and send us this little report card type thing, "You have an 88%" or "You have a 69%," or, you know, "You don't have 100% on your IEPs. If the speech IEP didn't come in, which is not my fault, you know. A lot of times I would hand my IEP to our program director. And if she didn't get it from everyone, I would get cited for it, or for a speech evaluation that hadn't come in, or the report from the psychologist. It always bounced on the teacher. It's not enough that you're working and trying to do your best for the kids, but then they'd-- one time I got like an 88%. And for those that got 100% they got this little packet of-- stickers and pencils . . . I didn't want that!

Some teachers described incidents in which their supervisors failed to back them up in critical situations, especially with parents and/or building administrators, or to go to bat for them in acquiring resources.

In one case, a teacher described increasing difficulties with a group of parents who were critical of her instructional program. Support from the administration was limited to a single visit by a supervisor to suggest alternative instructional materials. Problems with these parents continued for the remainder of the year. She described her final year as a special education teacher this way:

> Downtown could have backed me up. I don't feel they did; I think they were afraid of a lawsuit. But it was easier for them, see. They don't worry about what's best for the kids, at all. That's way down the line. Because what's best for the kid would have been to back me up in trying to do what was best for the kid. Instead, they want to placate the parents and to heck with the kid. And the kid goes down the tubes. It was just so physically and mentally draining, and it was degrading. I really needed an escape.

Several teachers reported feeling that they were not valued, that there was an apparent lack of regard for their opinions, and that they were not treated as professional equals. And as one teacher put it, the important thing was not always in getting the resources, but rather in feeling that someone was out there advocating for her needs.

> I always knew that if I asked for another person or something that was going to cost money, I might get it and I might not. But for people to feel that what I was doing was worthwhile is really what I would have wanted.

> I think if I had felt that they really cared about what was going on. And even if I felt they cared and they couldn't do anything about it, it'd be better than, just this feeling like they really didn't care.

Other times teachers felt devalued as a result of the way they were informed about changes that would affect their work. For example, several teachers reported being notified of their program's elimination or transfer by mail. According to these teachers, such notifications often came at the last minute, and it was not clear to them that such a delay was necessary. Teachers interpreted the style and timing of these communications as impersonal, as they left teachers feeling devalued and questioning the importance of their role in the organization.

3.4.3 Perceptions in Conflicting Priorities or Values

Eisenberger et al. (1986) argued that "perceived organizational support would be influenced by various aspects of an employee's treatment by the organization and would, in turn, influence the employee's interpretation of organizational motives underlying that treatment (p. 501)." Over half of the teachers interviewed discussed a common belief that some or all of their special education administrators were guided by underlying values and/or priorities that were in conflict with their own. Teachers often cited this type of conflict as a sizable contributing factor to their decisions to leave special education teaching. Many of the stories suggested that these teachers perceived an adversarial basis to their relationships with the central office.

In most cases, teachers formed perceptions about administrative values and priorities, not based on direct discussion with administrators, *but rather on their interpretations of administrative decisions and/or actions taken over time.* In the absence of direct communication, teachers tended to draw their own conclusions regarding administrators' values and priorities. For example, when administrators recognized or rewarded special education faculty for meeting paperwork goals, while paying little attention to teachers' successes with students, teachers often interpreted this to mean that administrators prioritize or value legal compliance over making meaningful strides with students.

Several teachers reported receiving a packet of "pencils and stickers" from the special education division as kudos for meeting paperwork goals. This response to compliance, when coupled with the absence of positive feedback regarding teachers' student-related achievements (or with ongoing shortages of resources), was often perceived as a conflict in values by teachers and was discussed as a marked source of frustration.

> And they sent me my little packet of pencils. What a joke. (laughs) But I think that probably drove me over, those kind of things. To have new forms every year . . . and here I begged for computers for my kids, because they couldn't do the work.
>
> I don't, I didn't feel that people were backing up the students' needs. But that they were covering their legal behinds.

In one case, a teacher discussed her conflict in values as they became evident through a conversation with one of her administrators:

> I've even had the administration tell me to my face, "We are only required to do the minimum. We don't have to do a maximum. We just have to do what the law says." Period. That's it. Anything more, and there's no support for it. They draw the line right there. I mean, there's

> no vision for what a good special education department does. There's no good vision for what good teachers do.

Additionally, several teachers reported believing that administrative decisions were based, to a large extent, on economic criteria without regard to what is best for children. Again, teachers drew these conclusions from their interpretations of decisions made by administrators and not from any discussion between the two parties regarding the underlying values giving rise to these administrative decisions.

> You know, not caring that you need equipment for those kids. In this program, not caring that these kids needed computers, because they were physically handicapped, but "Oh, we don't have the money right now." And yet when they purchased computers, they purchased all kinds of crap that we didn't need.
>
> They're looking at figures and money on paper. And they see that, "Oh, this program takes a teacher, an aide, and an interpreter. Wow! That's a lot of money! Let's cut that one out."

Several teachers talked about unfavorable administrative decisions regarding their special education programs and attributed these to a perception that administrators tended to be more concerned with containing costs and meeting efficiency standards than they were with providing and maintaining optimal learning environments for children. In each case, administrative actions were seen as reflecting conflicting values, and teachers were left feeling outside of the decision loop.

> I see people putting kids in slots and not really even caring if it's the right slot. It's just like they come in and we're going to stick 'em over here, and nobody cares. I don't see any caring from the administration now as to what's happening with these kids. And I don't think anybody's saying, "Hey! We're in this for the kids!"
>
> You know, before [the current administration], any time that we said, "You know, this child needs to either move out or move on," they didn't say, you know, "Well, he hasn't been there long enough," or "It's not the right time of year." Or you know, anything. I mean, it was done, it was done for the child, it wasn't of convenience to anybody else, it was for the child.

In one case, a teacher explained how the NS program in her school had been dismantled because a school administrator determined that it was not financially "sound."

> Then the administration changed and decided that this was not appropriate . . . having two teachers in a classroom with 25 students was not sound. And that this would have to end. All teachers were withdrawn from classes.

In the absence of discussion between administrators and teachers regarding what influences administrative decisions, teachers tended to draw their own conclusions. Often they assumed an "us" versus "them" relationship, believing that their fundamental values for special education directly conflicted with those of the central office. In a recent study of teacher workplace commitment, Kushman (1992) asserts that organizational commitment is reflected in the degree to which a person experiences a sense of shared values with their organization:

> Organizational commitment refers to the degree that an individual internalizes organizational values and goals and feels a sense of loyalty to the workplace. This type of commitment reflects an alignment between individual and organizational needs and values, thereby resulting in a strong unity of purpose among workers and work groups. (p. 7)

Based of the frequency and intensity with which these teachers discussed conflicts in values with their special education administrators, there is evidence that these leavers experienced particularly low levels of organizational commitment during the period leading to their decisions to leave special education teaching.

3.5 Match:
Fit Between Teacher and Assignment

There are many dimensions upon which an individual and a job must match in order to form an employment relationship that is satisfactory to both the job holder and the employing organization. Teaching assignments, for example, are characterized by numerous and diverse requirements and rewards, both intrinsic and extrinsic in nature. Teachers, on the other hand, are characterized, minimally, by their level of qualification, professional and personal expectations, values, and pedagogical beliefs. A critical and often overlooked issue in staffing is the degree of fit or match between the characteristics of the person and the job. The importance of match cannot be overemphasized, as it impacts many vital organizational outcomes including job performance, employee satisfaction, and retention.

The importance of match was evident in the career stories of all 17 of these former special education teachers. In two cases, match appeared as a central theme of the story. Both of these teachers chronicled years of unsuccessful attempts to secure an assignment that fit their professional interests and perceived skills. In both cases, their low seniority in the district served as a major deterrent to their success. Using a more fluid conception of match and mismatch helps to understand the series of frustrations and successes in the twenty-plus year career of a teacher who wove in and out of bilingual education and special education, through a variety of teaching, counseling, and administrative jobs that variously fit her *evolving* professional interests and skills.

In the majority of cases, the decision to leave special education teaching in the district was influenced, at least in part, by teachers' dissatisfaction with the low degree of match they experienced with various aspects of their current assignments. For a few teachers the reverse was true. These teachers had secured well suited assignments but were faced with district-initiated changes that necessitated a move. In each case, the teacher tended to go where the degree of match appeared greatest, even if that meant leaving special education.

In most cases, the basis of poor fit went well beyond teachers' personal preferences for a particular type of assignment. Match appeared to relate, more often, to a heightened degree of incompatibility between teachers' professional expectations and values, and the various requirements and rewards embedded in their assignments. For some of these teachers, professional interests or approaches to teaching may trace back to what sparked their initial interest in special education teaching as a career, or to the focus and content of their initial teacher training program. For others, their professional views were tied to their career experiences, reflecting many years of trial and error and pedagogical development.

In the context of match, three major aspects of assignment surfaced repeatedly in teachers' stories: a) the specific special education service delivery model or program, b) the school in which the teacher worked, and c) the particular population of students assigned to the teacher.

3.5.1 Special Education Service Delivery Model

Over half of the teachers with whom we spoke raised the issue of match between themselves and aspects of the service delivery model in which they had been working the year they decided to leave. Highlighting the truly individual nature of the match question, several separate themes and sub-themes were evident.

Most frequently, these teachers indicated a desire to spend more time providing direct instructional services to students and less time coordinating with classroom teachers and serving essentially as "case managers" of students' schedules and programs. The particulars of each case were relative to the nature of the current assignment.

For three teachers, the fragmented nature of the resource model presented a barrier to doing the kind of teaching they were dedicated to. One had been working in a self-contained special classroom but was forced to make an assignment change due to enrollment shifts. Three years before, she had worked briefly as a resource teacher and had never felt comfortable with the fragmented nature of the schedule in that setting. She described her decision to return to a 6th grade classroom this way:

> [The district] was going toward more and more integration into the classrooms. I feel--I need a classroom of my own. There's something about the challenge of this bare room and making it into a learning environment that I enjoy. And so I needed that. I missed that when I was [in the resource room program] there. It changed every hour -- the components changed. That resource room would not be, quote, my room. They're pushing you to get out into the [general education classrooms] -- it's not a pull-out [model] You go to their room more often than

> not. And I didn't want that. [I wanted] a situation where I could have my room and my space.

Two others who were each working in a more traditional resource, pull-out model expressed a similar desire to return to a self-contained classroom:

> I wanted to get out of resource. I wanted my own class...so that I could teach content areas -- so that I could teach P.E., and art, different things like that -- the units -- instead of just targeting skills. Although I would do units and group things, but, it wasn't like they were my students. They'd just come in, we'd work on certain skills. I wanted my own class. I wanted that kind of bonding and to be able to have a whole day to do whatever I wanted.

> With a self-contained class, you just do your own thing. You can, you know. And that's why I wanted to get out of special ed anyway, because I wanted again to be able to have control of my own class. I wanted to be in charge of what was going on. Because once I got into resource I wasn't in charge.

Both left special education for general education classroom teaching assignments in their respective schools.

For four others, the concern centered more on the increased push toward a more collaborative/consultative model. For each of these former special educators, being a teacher meant working directly with students and being able to actually see their progress. Further, several had both philosophical and practical reservations about the new consultation model. They were clearly not convinced that this approach to special education service was truly in the best interests of students.

One teacher's story provides an illustration of this concern. Hired as a speech therapist, she had been told her role was to consult and collaborate with the classroom teacher rather than to individually work with the students. Yet she noted, for example, that one student diagnosed with autism clearly needed direct therapy time. "He was nonverbal. He needed sign language. The teacher didn't sign." She went on: "I saw a lot of these kids, especially in the preschool population, that were very needy, and I really strongly believe in early intervention. And we were just told that we're consultants." This teacher ultimately left and set up a private therapy practice in her home.

Another speech/language pathologist had spent many years working in a self-contained special education classroom teaching reading to students diagnosed as having significant language delays or impairments. When the self-contained classes were closed by the district, this teacher returned to an itinerant service delivery model, providing short-term speech therapy to students. As she spoke, the lack of match on pedagogical grounds was glaring. After several apparently frustrating years, she chose to retire early. Before turning in her paperwork, however, she negotiated an instructional assistant assignment in a middle school where she was allowed to teach reading to small groups of students who were experiencing difficulty learning to read through conventional instruction.

Professionally, this assignment was a perfect match for her. She started this new job immediately after retirement.

In contrast, the frustration of two other teachers stemmed from their *not* being allowed to implement the recommended consultative, co-teaching model in their respective schools. Both had prior experience working as co-teachers in general education settings and were firm believers in that approach for meeting the needs of students with disabilities. In one case, the school principal deemed the program economically unsound and eliminated it, requiring a return to the more traditional pull-out service approach. In the other, the program was eliminated due to a drop in student enrollment at the school, coupled with similar administrative concerns about the fiscal efficiency of staffing an in-class approach for a small group of students.

The following excerpts are taken from the interview with one of these teachers. They illustrate the connection between this teacher's professional philosophy and beliefs about what her students most need and her stated "preference" for a particular service delivery model.

> For the first two years [at this school] I sort of got my bearings and I also became involved in diagnostic work. So I got to see more about how the students were identified and placed into the programs, and really what their capabilities were. And I became convinced that they weren't that different, that I'd been right all along. What is required is better teaching and better material. . . . Holding them in a place where they felt even more unusually set apart, and [were] made to feel less worthy was not the way to entice them into learning the skills they needed. I came from the philosophy that it is not *your* kids and *my* kids, but *our* kids. And there were several teachers . . . who embraced that. . . . And they became my core of support in the school environment. They were such good teachers, and they had no special education experience, but it just proved to me that good instruction with exciting materials and that essence of commitment and absolute love for what they were doing was what was important. . . . For four years I taught with [these teachers]. Then the administration [of the school] changed and [the new administrator] decided that this was not appropriate -- that the numbers of students in the classes with the numbers of teachers, having two teachers in a classroom with 25 students, was not sound, and that this would have to end.

After the return to the more traditional special education model, this teacher continued to work in the school for 3 years. At that point, however, based on the interaction of several work-related and personal factors, she was faced with a decision about continuing her work there or moving on. In contemplating her options, the tension resulting from the poor current match between her beliefs -- based on what she had seen to be both effective and exciting -- and the service model mandated by the new principal was listed as the "number one" consideration. As she put it, "I realized I was in a place where I was more or less alone philosophically. This special education program was not the one that I was devoted to. It was not working the way I believed it should work." She chose to leave special education, and moved into a general education teaching position in her school where she could continue integrating students diagnosed with mild academic disabilities.

Finally, one leaver based her decision, at least in part, on a basic philosophical disagreement with the premise of *all current* special education service models. When asked to summarize the factors that influenced her decision to move out of special education and into a compensatory reading instruction program, she quickly explained:

> I really like to be more proactive than reactive. Because special education won't identify children until they're in 2nd grade at least, or 3rd grade, it means that these kids have already had two years of failure. I don't like to see kids experience failure for so long. If we could intervene earlier without labeling, it would be much more productive. So that was one -- the labeling, and the late intervention versus early.

Most prominent across the stories of match between teacher and service model is how these teachers' stated preferences are based on their professional philosophies and beliefs. Understanding the origin of these beliefs might provide a key to designing efforts to enhance match in this area.

In some instances, stated beliefs could be traced back to the perspective of the initial special education training program. The speech pathologist's emphasis on one-to-one and small group therapy presents an excellent example. Further, the current skill repertoire of an individual teacher is also worth consideration. Inherent in these different service models are different roles and responsibilities for the special educator – each requiring a somewhat unique set of skills. For example, the skills required for consultation with other adults are different than the skills required for teaching reading. Interestingly, few of the teachers made an explicit connection between their preferred service delivery model and their perceptions of their own current levels of professional skills.

Stated philosophies can also be linked directly to the specifics of career experiences -- to what the teacher has done, what is familiar and comfortable. New models generally represent significant change away from the familiar, and as such include inherent risks, particularly for a veteran.

It should be noted, however, that most of these teachers tied their stated philosophies to what they had personally seen work and not work. They were not arguing merely for a return to the familiar. To some extent, their concerns about service delivery model may reflect the fact that, in initiating programmatic changes, local districts frequently fail to take into account either the individual or the collective craft knowledge of its teaching staff. Yet teachers' experiential knowledge can represent a rich source of data to guide a district's efforts to improve programs and services for its students.

3.5.2 The School Site

The school site as an important component of assignment is a comparatively new theme for special educators. Some 30 years ago, most special education programs were housed in segregated locations. Later, even as these programs moved onto general education campuses, the choice of school was not viewed as a particularly important decision. Initially, special education programs were most often located in separate wings, basements, or backyard portable buildings, and they operated on a schedule independent of the instructional schedule of the host school. Further, these programs were both staffed and administered separately.

Increasingly across the last two decades, however, the operative word in the field of special education has been "integration." The focus is on integrated locations for special education programs, integrated service models for students enrolled in special education, integrated administration of the various instructional programs serving all students, and integration of the work of special and general education teachers. Based on our interviews, it was clear that the school is no longer viewed narrowly as simply the location for the special education program. In fact, for many of these former special education teachers the choice of school was frequently central to the overall discussion of teacher-assignment match. More to the point, these stories provide evidence that choice of school at times played a key role in special education teacher attrition.

As was the case with service delivery model, several themes were evident in the career stories told by these teachers. At the most basic level, one theme was that of *history* – possibly translated as familiarity. A number of these teachers had spent many years working in the same school. When faced with either their own desire for a program change or, more often, a district-mandated program change, allegiance to school played a clear role in their final decision about their next assignment.

One leaver had moved infrequently over her 36 year career as first a general education and later a special education teacher. In fact, her last 11 years had been in the same building. As she described it, she was nearing, but not quite ready for, retirement when a drop in the enrollment of her NS program presented her with a major choice. She could continue working in her current school at a reduced FTE, transfer to a full-time NS position in a new building, or combine part-time NS positions in two buildings to equal a full-time FTE.

She quickly rejected the third option, preferring not to attempt to juggle a split school assignment, but also felt strongly that she could not transfer to a new building in order to retain her full-time job. As she described it: "I wanted Central Elementary because I enjoyed it there so much. I thought it was an outstanding faculty and principal and the general esprit de corps and cooperation and the whole outlook of the school, I thought, was so positive. ...I didn't want to go anywhere else except Central." A particularly attractive retirement incentive was offered by the state that spring. In this teacher's case continuing to work part-time would have actually produced lower income than retiring. Very reluctantly, she opted to retire.

The role of school preference based on longevity was somewhat more indirect -- but clearly a contributing factor -- for two other teachers. Here, school preference ultimately led to problems. One had spent all 12 years of her teaching career working in the same school in a self-contained special classroom for students labeled Educabally Mentally Habdicapped, when an enrollment drop forced relocation of the program. The other had been in her building for the last 18 years providing resource services to students with hearing impairments when she became faced with a required assignment change. In order to remain in their schools, both of these teachers opted to transfer into the NS position in their respective buildings, a move which represented a significantly different type of special education setting for them.

The first teacher described her decision this way: "I didn't want to leave the building. I really liked the people; and it's close to home. I was really involved in activities, faculty things." After a most difficult year as a NS teacher, she worked out an early retirement, and left feeling very bitter about her lack of success that final year. The second teacher held out in her new assignment for three years, but never really seemed to settle into the NS model. Ultimately, she also took early retirement.

One aspect of school allegiance worthy of special note was that of strong, positive collegial relationships. Most often, these relationships were between the special educator and one or more classroom teachers. In some cases, however, the supportive role of the principal was also key. The story of Anne provides an excellent illustration of the power such relationships can have on the overall functioning and success of the special education teacher's work.

Over a 10-year period starting in 1975, Anne had worked in both self-contained classroom and itinerant special education assignments in a number of schools in the district. In 1985, she took a position at White Elementary working in what was then set up as a pull-out program for students with varying degrees of hearing impairment. She remained in that position for the next seven years. In reviewing her career, Anne called her time at White "a period of growth that I just will treasure forever."

Anne described her initial frustrations with the pull-out model and her desire to increase the meaningful integration of her students. Then she related the slow but steady process she undertook to build strong working relationships with her general education colleagues to facilitate that end. According to Anne, what helped most was the consistent support and encouragement she received from her building principal.

> She was concerned about educating the kids. She talked about the important stuff and she cared about what the kids were learning and how they were learning it. [As part of a district-wide initiative on improving schools,] she had

> meetings with all of us, and asked US what we wanted to work on, what we thought we'd like to see happening in the school.

Sometime during her fourth year at White, the principal arranged for Anne and two of her general education colleagues to participate in a summer leadership academy. During this time together, the three formed a real team, resulting in the subsequent development of a functioning co-teaching model between these special and general educators. Anne was obviously extremely proud of the model they built and the success they were having with the students enrolled in the program. She described the overall effect on her this way: "I started feeling a sense of power -- in being able to do something and being able to change things."

Three years later, however, as a result of low student enrollment, the program at White was discontinued. Understandably, Anne was devastated. In relating her decision to leave special education and move into a general education classroom at White, Anne stated simply:

> I had tremendous support from the principal at that school, and didn't want to lose that support. So I decided to get out of the special education program because I was hating what was going on. And I knew that I'd still get supported by her, so I just wanted to stay there.

Allegiance to the school did not always depend on a long tenure or a stellar principal. For some, their current school was *just a good overall fit* resulting from some combination of the kids, the faculty, the administration, and, in a couple of cases, even the location. Of the 27 teachers in the full 1991-92 leaver cohort for this district, eight moved into general education teaching assignments in the district. Interestingly, for six of these eight, their move to a classroom teaching position allowed them to remain in their current and *preferred* school.

In the area of teacher-school match, more than any other, the issue of personal -- as opposed to professional -- preference was occasionally evident in the discussion. Two teachers specifically indicated that personal factors played a role in their decisions to remain in their school. One noted she had recently purchased a home in the neighborhood and wished to work close to her home. The other spoke about the close personal friendships she had developed at the school. More often, however, the personal and professional somewhat merged. Teachers spoke generally about liking the school and the people -- the students, the faculty, the administrators -- and feeling comfortable there.

The other end of the continuum was also evident, however. There were several clear cases where teachers had spent years cultivating positive working relationships with colleagues -- relationships that they saw as essential to the success of their efforts to integrate their students into the academic and social life of the school. These relationships, then, became for them tight links to the school.

3.3.3 Population/Students Taught

In listening to these teachers, it was clear that while special educators generally see themselves as relatively eclectic, they also have some preferences regarding the types of students with whom they work. Special education students range from three-year old preschoolers to 21-year-olds ready to transition into life after school; from students experiencing mild academic difficulties to those experiencing significant developmental disabilities or delays; from those who have some level of hearing or vision impairment to those classified as medically fragile.

For some, affinities for teaching a certain type of student can be traced back to a time before they began their careers -- to those factors that initially influenced them to consider working in special education. A teacher of students labeled hearing impaired or deaf spoke of two close high school friends who were deaf, and how her friendship with them had led her from what was initially a mild curiosity to what eventually became a strong professional interest in language and communication. Another went back to her college days and spoke of her experience working part-time in a residential home for people with significant physical and developmental disabilities. She eventually switched her major to psychology and then to special education so that she could continue this work professionally. One teacher spoke of the rewards of working with teenagers to learn job skills, while another shared her enjoyment of helping preschool children learn language.

For others, the preferences appeared tied to the content and focus of their training programs, to their prior teaching experience, or even to their own assessments of their current skill levels.

Across these 17 interviews, there was only one case in which a mismatch based on type of student was directly linked to the leaving decision. The first 19 years of Mary's career had been spent teaching in general education classrooms in rural Iowa. She worked at the elementary level, particularly grades 5 and 6. In explaining her decision to seek a Master's degree in special education, Mary said: "I wanted to use what I thought would be some new techniques for behavioral problems in a regular classroom."

Mary's first special education assignment as a middle school resource teacher was a reasonable match for her, though the resource room model itself took some getting use to. But after two years in that setting, staffing cut-backs and reassignments eliminated her position. Because her Masters included an ED endorsement, she was offered a position in a primary, self-contained special class for students labeled emotionally handicapped. The move represented a double challenge for Mary in terms of student population -- the age of the students and the nature of their needs. She describes it this way:

> I remember asking them at that time, "Are you sure you want me in a primary classroom?" I had not taught 3rd grade even for years, and that's not as primary as you're talking. "Are you sure?" "Yes. Are you saying you don't want it?"

> "No, no, no, I want to teach!" So that's how I got into it. But, you know, rural Iowa -- the severity of the student is very different. It's a very different picture in this city. ...The kids that I had before were certainly not behavioral disordered; they were just going through a rough time and having some rough adjustments to life that affected their behaviors. They would not be, quote, labeled, I don't believe.

Mary lasted for two years and told of multiple highs and lows during that time. She described her decision to leave special education and return to a 6th grade classroom this way:

> It was my choice to go back into a regular classroom. I was fairly burned out. I had to have a hysterectomy last summer. So it was one of those deals where I think maybe I'd rather go back to a regular classroom.

At the time of leaving, Mary said: "I felt defeated -- or like I hadn't done what I was supposed to do somehow or another." In contrast, she described her new assignment as "essentially what I started out to do when I first started to take classes [for my Master's]."

While not as central as Mary's, some sense of mismatch between teacher and student population did play a role in a number of other leaving stories. Reflecting both social changes and district-initiated changes in service delivery models, several teachers spoke of the gradual increase in the severity of disabilities in the students being assigned to their classes. One teacher, for example, moved from a self-contained to a resource program at least in part due to her sense of the changing composition of her caseload. Her background was teaching academics, and many of her new students required a more functional curriculum. She never settled into the new setting, however, and after what she described as a particularly frustrating year she chose an early retirement.

In contrast, another teacher whose interest and background was working with young students with multiple physical and developmental disabilities told of struggling through 3 years in an intermediate resource room where the focus was academics. The stress of that adjustment, coupled with multiple organizational and personal factors, led to her decision to move out of special education and into a general education classroom.

Particularly in the area of match with student population, some teachers' stated preferences reflected work assignments where they felt they could be most effective. The comments of these two teachers provide illustrations of the concerns expressed by a number of their colleagues:

> I feel I was mostly successful with kids who had learning problems, or skill deficiencies. I wasn't terribly successful with kids who had social dysfunction, kids who were coming out of very dysfunctional families with no support at school, no support from social agencies.

> I had children [in my resource room] that had been labeled LD, but I thought that they were more [developmentally disabled]. There weren't many, but I think that's maybe what started my frustration -- that I didn't have the background. I was always having to call my girlfriend [and ask], "Am I doing this right? Is this too much? What's typical?"

Discussions with a local administrator reinforced this issue. She noted that until very recently local special education teacher training programs had been categorically organized. As such, the content and focus of these programs were often a poor match for the realities of the NS programs used in the district.

3.5.4 General Observations About Teacher-Assignment Match

These three aspects of assignment, service delivery model, school site, and student population seldom surfaced alone. Rather, they were most often interrelated such that the search for a good match required a trade-off of sorts for the individual teacher. While each story had its own unique set of circumstances, the story of Jane provides a representative example. Having worked in both self-contained special classes and resource programs across her 13 years in special education, Jane expressed a clear preference for the classroom setting. During what was to be her last year in special education, however, Jane agreed to take a resource position in her school at the request of her principal. For a number of reasons, the year did not go well. At the end of the year, Jane concluded, "I wanted to get out of resource. I wanted my own class." Unfortunately, there was no special class opening at the school. Allegiance to her school further complicated the decision for Jane: "I didn't want to just leave the school and teach someplace else. I like the school. I also like the people. And I just bought a house...in the neighborhood." Ultimately, she opted to remain in the school, leave special education teaching, and move into a general education classroom position.

In looking across these interviews and considering the theme of assignment-teacher match, several general observations deserve mention.

The Temporal Link Between Match And The Attrition Decision

In looking across these stories, we were interested in the temporal link between teacher-assignment match and the decision to leave special education teaching. Would, for example, a teacher's perception of serious mismatch lead immediately to attrition? Conversely, to what extent might perceived mismatch contribute to overall job dissatisfaction which, over time, would influence first a desire and ultimately a decision to leave?

The 17 stories of this leaver cohort included examples of both ends of this continuum and many that fell somewhere in between. Several teachers left when their assignment no longer matched their professional interests and skills. In contrast, one teacher spent her whole career unable to get an assignment that was truly a fit for her. Her great interest and career goal was to work with primary level children who had physical impairments: "...to me that *was* ideal. To me, that was something to strive for." There were only a handful of these positions in the district, however, and low seniority generally prevented her from securing one of the slots. Thus, she spent nine years as a special education teacher in the district, working in three different schools and special education settings, none of which were a particularly good fit for her. She never seemed to actually settle in. Rather, the stress seemed to build and, particularly over the final four years of her special education teaching career, overflowed to her home, negatively affecting her health. This teacher described her career this way:

> The way I see it, I was put somewhere or I went somewhere and I made the best of it. Then I went somewhere else and I made the best of it. I never really-- My long-term goals when I first started were to be in the physically handicapped class. And even until last year my goal was to get into the physically handicapped--in primary class. I just got really burnt out. . . . I've never really had [the experience of]: "This is what I'm going to do" -- and had that happen.

She finally opted to move out of special education and into a general education classroom.

More often, the timing of the link between mismatch and attrition was less extreme -- neither immediate nor stretching through the entire career period. Rather, the career stories of a number of these teachers revealed that individuals often lasted one, two, three or even more years in an assignment that represented a poor match for them before making a move to change the situation. Yet it was equally clear for several of these teachers that their final decision to leave traced back at least in part to frustration built up over time resulting from poor teacher-assignment match.

The Effect Of The Move On Assignment-Match

We were interested in the degree to which the move out of special education represented an actual move toward a better fit for the individual. Once again, the stories reflected great variation.

Even across the six teachers who chose retirement, reactions to the move ranged from some degree of contentment to some level of regret -- what one retiree labeled "retirement grief." In fact, several retirees indicated that they continued to be available as substitutes and enjoyed the opportunity to return to the classroom. One went even further and began working after retirement as an instructional assistant in order to be able to teach in a setting that better matched her educational philosophy and career goals.

Of the eleven teachers who resigned, rather than retired, from special education teaching, there was evidence that five made changes that reflected a clear improvement in teacher-assignment match. One teacher, for example, who had been prevented from implementing a co-teaching model in her school, moved into a general education classroom assignment in the building where she was able to continue working with her general education colleagues to enhance the integration of students with mild academic difficulties. Another who seriously questioned the remedial focus of special education moved into a compensatory reading program with a strong preventative focus.

In contrast, the remaining six resignees would have to be characterized as "in transition." Their current assignments reflected more a move away from what was troubling them in special education than a move toward a better assignment match.

Current Challenges to Teacher-Assignment Match.

Finally, these interviews provided some evidence that teachers' efforts to improve the fit of their assignment may be increasingly coming head-to-head with both fiscal realities and current trends in special education service delivery. This played out in a couple of ways.

Undeniably, special education was changing in this district. In the face of these changes, mismatch did not always happen as a result of a new assignment. Rather, at times it happened gradually to a teacher who had been in the same assignment for years as the nature of that assignment changed. Teachers, for example, who desired to work in self-contained special classes were finding that these programs were gradually being eliminated. Teachers whose professional interests, training, and/or perceived skills were matched to a particular population of students were increasingly facing greater severity and diversity of need in their caseloads.

Further, it appeared that the changes in the district's programs were also causing more frequent movement of special education teachers across assignments within the district. When we looked at the list of in-district transfers for the 1991-92 school year, only one move represented a voluntary transfer initiated by the teacher. The remaining transfers were termed "district-initiated" and resulted from enrollment fluctuations, student and/or program relocations, and program redesign or elimination. Each forced change presented a challenge to teacher-assignment match.

The challenge was made even more difficult by the transfer policies of this district, many dictated by the existing contract with the teachers' union. Given that the teacher held the appropriate credential for the position, reassignment was generally based predominantly on seniority. Although dislocated teachers did have an opportunity to apply for positions that interested them, in most cases a job went to the most senior applicant who qualified for the position. Teachers who failed to secure preferred assignments were matched by district administrators to the remaining openings based in large part on the special education credential they held. Because special education credentials were generally broad and qualified teachers for a wide range of program types and disability categories, the potential for mismatch from the perspective of the teacher -- as well as the district -- was great.

The new NS program presented another example. Because the program was non-categorical, any special education certificate was acceptable. As one administrator explained, if in August, as most of the openings have been filled, you are left with an NS slot and a teacher with a certificate, training, and experience in hearing impairments, you are in effect forced to make that match because it is appropriate by the guidelines -- even though that teacher may have no background either in behavior or learning disabilities. She went on to say that some teachers refused to report having certain certificates, particularly SED endorsements, because they did not want to be matched to those classes.

One interesting loophole was reported, however. Teachers in a given building had first choice for any openings in that building. The only requirements were that the teacher have the proper teaching credential and the principal agree to the move. This policy may well account, at least in part, for the increased movement of special education teachers into general education classrooms in their current school buildings.

3.6 The Dynamic and Complex Nature of Leaving

Beyond the focus on specific factors that influence attrition decisions, these interviews taken as a group provide support for a number of broader observations about the nature of leaving. Most importantly, they reaffirm the view of leaving as a complex process. The decision to leave a job or to change careers is rarely simple; more commonly, it emerges gradually from the interactions of multiple factors, both personal and professional, which change in shape and influence over time.

In the final section of this chapter, we briefly discuss four broad observations about leaving drawn from the career and leaving stories of the 17 former special education teachers of District 1.

3.6.1 Leaving: The Interaction of Multiple Factors

Taken together, the three themes discussed in this chapter (job design, relations with central office, and fit of assignment) reflect the full range of work-related issues raised by these teachers as influential to their leaving decisions. At some level each theme is distinct, thereby allowing us to look more closely at its meaning and the various ways it plays out in the careers of individual teachers.

However, it should be stressed that in no case was the leaving story of a teacher based solely on one of these three themes. This interrelationship among the themes makes it impossible, with any confidence, to attempt to quantify or compare the relative influence of one to the other. In fact, themes lose meaning when viewed as competing rather than interrelated forces. Taken together they provide a more realistic indicator of the complexity of the work experience and, therefore, of the work-related issues that influence the leaving decision.

3.6.2 The Influence of Personal Factors

As reflected in our original framework, work-related factors are not presumed to be the sole explanation for attrition. Factors external to the work often clearly play some role. As part of these interviews, we encouraged teachers to reflect on the relationship between their lives outside of work and their lives as special education teachers. We particularly asked teachers to talk about their sense of the influence of their personal lives on their leaving decision.

Drawing strictly on these teachers' own attributions, 3 of the 17 cited personal factors as *primary* in their decisions to leave special education teaching. The issues for these teachers centered on their own health, the health of a family member, and/or various life style changes such as remarriage or a spouse's recent retirement. It should be noted, however, that all three stories also included clear evidence of dissatisfaction with major aspects of the work experience.

An additional five teachers cited personal factors as *contributing* to their decisions. For each of these teachers, the decision was presented as a combination of work-related concerns and personal factors that supported the attrition decision. In looking across their stories, two patterns emerged. In some cases, teachers talked about a desire to achieve a better balance between their work and family lives. Ultimately, their search for balance influenced their decision to leave. One teacher, for example, had been working part-time. Her inability to continue her current part-time assignment in special education, coupled with some very real concerns about the way her work was structured, led to her decision to transfer to a part-time general education teaching position in her building. In other cases, however, the issue was not simply one of balance. Rather, the leaving stories reflected simultaneously increasing stress in both work and home environments. In an effort to reduce this stress, two teachers moved into general education classroom positions, and a third chose to retire.

Interestingly, for over half of these teacher leavers, personal factors were not viewed as relevant to their leaving decisions and were not included in the leaving story presented during the interview.

Roughly one third of the teachers we interviewed retired at the end of the school year. We were curious about the nature of those retirement decisions and the extent to which they differed from the attrition decisions of colleagues who remained in education but outside of special education teaching. In fact, the six retirees were represented in all three groups. Two of the six cited personal factors as primary, reflecting both health and lifestyle changes. One retiree saw personal factors as contributing but acknowledged growing dissatisfaction with aspects of the work experience.

The remaining three did not feel that personal factors entered into their retirement decisions. Two of the three stressed that they were retiring earlier than they had planned based solely on growing frustrations with their work. For a third, enrollment shifts in her program had presented her with a dilemma. She could continue working in her school but drop down to part time; she could continue in her school part time and add a second school to complete her full-time position; or she could request a transfer to a new building. Based on the retirement incentive being offered, the first option would have actually netted her less income, as she already qualified for retirement at full salary. Because she felt that the second two options were not acceptable, she reluctantly retired. While some of these leavers reported missing aspects of their work in special education, this teacher was the only one of the seventeen to express unqualified regret about her leaving decision. While acknowledging that she was looking forward to increased time to travel, she described herself as currently in a period of "retirement grief."

3.6.3 A Decision Made Over Time

Our interviews with this group of leavers clearly supported the assumption that the attrition decision is made over time. With only a few exceptions, the stories of these teachers provided evidence of issues dating back multiple years. This was true even in the cases of two teachers who concentrated their attention on issues stemming from their final year in the special education classroom.

Across the group, a couple of different patterns were evident. For some teachers, the decision to leave could be traced back several years either to a significant work-related event never recovered from or to some imposed change never fully adjusted to. In these cases, the past event or change prompted a desire to leave that increased with time.

The stories of other teachers more closely reflected the proverb that "it is not the 500th blow that cracks the stone of granite, but the 499 that came before." These leavers presented a series of smaller work-related issues, concerns, or events that were somewhat cumulative.

Reflecting the work-related categories outlined in the previous section of this chapter, teachers' concerns most frequently centered around changes in the service delivery model -- both the instructional and non-instructional components of the job--as well as the adequacy of support available to them as they attempted to respond to those changes. Further, for several teachers who had longer careers and were, therefore, in a position to compare or contrast the present with their memory of the past, the various changes they were dealing with were translated into an increasing sense of conflicting priorities, values, or goals between themselves and the district.

3.6.4 External Forces Prompting Reflection and Change

Focusing more narrowly on the final year or months of their tenures as special education teachers, the stories of these leavers document an interesting pattern. Fourteen of seventeen attrition decisions can be linked to an external force. This included both the availability of a new opportunity as well as forced changes. The key is that in each case it was something unplanned for and external to the teachers' ongoing personal and work-related issues.

For eight teachers, a newly presented opportunity was the stimulus. In five cases, the opportunity consisted of a special retirement incentive offered by the state. In two additional cases, it consisted of an unsolicited offer for different work which better matched the teacher's personal or professional needs. The final teacher had a personal opportunity to relocate with her partner.

Rather than seeking an opportunity, the remaining six teachers reacted to a forced change in their working situations. Due to some combination of enrollment shifts and programmatic adjustments, these teachers were notified that their current positions were no longer available for the coming year. They were given no choice but to investigate alternative assignments.

While there are obvious differences between the availability of new opportunities and the realities of mandated changes, the two have something in common. Both provide teachers with a stimulus for reflection on their current work situations and assessment of future options.

Most teachers directly linked these opportunities or forced changes to their actual leaving decisions. Some teachers went even further by observing that without this turn of events they would probably still be working--though somewhat reluctantly -- in their former positions as special education teachers.

> [Due to a programmatic change] I was able to transfer out, but that was just an accident. I mean, if that hadn't happened, I probably would still be there, and I would just be doing a lot less than could be done. I mean, I would do my best, but it was not what I wanted to be doing.

This pattern of external stimulus as a pre-condition for reflection upon working conditions, and ultimately as a prompt for attrition decisions, is evidence that dissatisfaction alone does not automatically lead to attrition. More importantly, it supports the notion that there are a number of dissatisfied stayers in some of our special education classrooms -- teachers who have either not yet reflected on and recognized their feelings about their work, or who are aware of their desire to leave but see no other alternatives.

CHAPTER 4
SURVEY RESULTS

4.1 Procedures

This section of the final report focuses on the responses of special education teachers from District One to the questionnaire, *Working in Special Education: The Experiences of Special Educators,* administered in spring 1992.

The following sections present a brief description of the development of items included in the questionnaire followed by the procedure employed for the various descriptive analyses, and a presentation and discussion of results. Three major analyses are reported: (a) factor analysis of all teachers working in the district who completed the survey; (b) analysis of those who expressed an intent to leave in the near future; and (c) analysis of differences in profiles of work-related leavers compared to those who stayed.

Sample. The questionnaire was administered in a large urban school district in the West, in a city that is among the 100 largest cities in the country. This is the same district that participated in the interview study discussed in Chapter 3. The district serves approximately 2000 special education students out of a total student enrollment of almost 60,000. The student population is approximately one third Hispanic and one half Caucasian. The remaining 16% is divided roughly evenly between Native American and African American.

The questionnaire was sent to all special education teachers in the district; 298 returned the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 84 percent. Table 4.1 below describes salient demographic features of the sample of special education teachers.

A second sample including an additional 570 special educators drawn from two other urban areas in the West was used for reliability analyses and for the factor analysis.

Instrument Development. Questionnaire items were identified through a multi-stage process. The first consisted of a literature review and synthesis by a team of researchers based on the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter One.

The questionnaire did not attempt to assess personal factors such as economic resources or life cycle variables. The main reason for this decision was that we were most interested in understanding factors on which school districts might have the greatest potential impact.

Retention topics of primary interest were refined through successive discussions among team members, and through discussions during initial site visits with staff from the participating districts.

Three overarching conceptual categories emerged from this process:

- *Preparation*
- *Workplace Conditions of Teaching,* and
- *Affective Responses to Conditions of Work.*

Table 4.1.1 Sample Characteristics (N=298)

	M	SD
Age	44.8	8.08
Years as special education teacher	12.2	5.88
Total years teaching experience	15.4	6.84

	Percent of Sample
Gender	
Male	18.5
Female	81.5
Teaching Environment	
Resource Room	54.9
Self Contained Class	32.3
Special School	7.4
Itinerant/Other	5.4
Grade Level	
Preschool	3.7
Elementary	43.4
Middle	15.8
High	23.9
Special School	8.8
Other	4.4

After these topics were identified, existing research instruments were examined. Relevant items for each area were extracted and used verbatim in some instances, while in other cases item wordings were modified for specific use with special education professionals. The key existing instruments and other literature sources utilized in this process included several from the field of special education (Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Coladarci, 1991), many others from the general education literature (Dansereau, 1972; Glidewell, Tucker, Todt, & Cox, 1983; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970; Rosenholtz, 1989; Louis Harris and Associates, 1985; The School and Staffing Survey of the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics, 1991; Yee, 1990) and several from the occupational literature (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Porter, Steer, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974)

When items available from these sources were exhausted across the key questionnaire topics, the resulting item clusters were examined and compared. Redundant items were eliminated. Some items were reworded to address the specific purposes of this project and the characteristics of the target sample. New items were generated where needed by project staff.

Review of the resulting draft questionnaire occurred in several stages. Copies of an early version were sent to Dr. Bonnie Billingsley, a researcher on the Research Triangle Institute Retention Project, and to several members of our National Advisory Panel. Dr. James Kauffman, Dr. Mary Beth Fafard, and Dr. Joan Thormann, along with Dr. Billingsley, responded to this draft. In addition, three doctoral students at the University of Oregon reviewed the draft and provided feedback on both the constructs and individual items. All suggestions were evaluated by project staff, and appropriate changes were made to the document.

Subsequent drafts of the questionnaire were reviewed by three additional University of Oregon doctoral students and nineteen special education teachers from the Eugene/Springfield area. The three doctoral students were all former special education teachers, only one year out of the classroom. The teachers were drawn from a variety of experience levels, programs, and settings -- elementary through secondary schools; self-contained, resource, and itinerant service models; and teachers of students from a range of disability categories.

In most cases, individuals first completed the questionnaire and then either provided written feedback or met with a staff member to discuss the draft. The review focused on a number of aspects of the draft including: (1) the issues addressed in the questionnaire; (2) the clarity and relevance of the individual items; and (3) overall length and ease of response. Feedback from all respondents was summarized and used in the revision process. In particular, on the basis of input from the special educators, a series of items was added asking to what extent teachers felt their building principals, central office, fellow teachers, and parents understood what they did.

Additional input from outside consultants was solicited on specific topics. Dr. Theodore Coladarci (a professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Maine), who has done research on special education teachers' feelings of efficacy, reviewed our items on this construct. In early March, Dr. Lewis Goldberg, from the University of Oregon's Psychology Department, met with project staff to discuss data analysis issues. Throughout the month of March, 1992, ongoing meetings were held with Dr. Patricia Gwartney-Gibbs, Professor of Sociology at the University of Oregon and a specialist in the area of survey research. These meetings focused on several aspects of survey methodology including strategies to increase response rates, item wording and format, the overall layout of the final questionnaire, and logistics of dissemination. Dr. Gwartney-Gibbs provided written feedback on various drafts of the questionnaire through its development process.

In March and April, 1992, project staff visited District One to get feedback from staff on the final version of the questionnaire. A variety of personnel reviewed the questionnaire during this phase, including special education directors and assistant directors for (1) speech/language and transition services; (2) bilingual special education; and (3) services for students with emotional or behavioral disabilities. In addition, we conducted interviews with two service center directors, two school psychologists, three program specialists, and a teacher on special assignment who handles compliance issues. Feedback focused mainly on item clarification and a few suggestions for additions to the item pool.

Data Analysis. Data were entered and analyzed on microcomputer, using *SPSS for the Macintosh* (1990). Frequency distributions with means and standard deviations were generated for all items, and coefficient alpha reliability was calculated for the 125 Likert-type and frequency items in the questionnaire. Subsequent to generation of these descriptive statistics and after careful inspection and cleaning of the data set, demographic descriptors were assembled to provide a portrait of the full sample and to serve the later purpose of examining demographic differences among key subsamples.

Factor analysis was then performed according to the procedures described below, utilizing principal components analysis and varimax rotation. Subsequent to identification of these factors and calculation of reliability for the resulting factor scores, the scales represented by these factors were utilized for comparative analysis of subsamples.

Reliability. Coefficient alpha reliability was computed for the 125-item instrument based on a sample of 868 special educators and speech therapists in 3 cities. The alpha obtained was .92, a high reliability coefficient, indicating that there is some overarching construct that this instrument measures. Based on the content of the items, it appears to measure some overall sense of job satisfaction.

The average inter-item correlation was .17. This would indicate that there were several relatively distinct (i.e. non-correlated) facets or factors that contributed to this sense of job satisfaction. It thus seemed reasonable to conduct a factor analysis of the entire instrument.

Scoring and Data Display

Scaling of items and selection of response categories varied depending on the questionnaire section. Most utilized a 5-point scale. Twelve out of the 125 items employed a 3-point scale. These were recoded so that 1 remained 1 whereas a 2 became 3 and a 3 became 5.

The 1 to 5 points on the Likert scale corresponded to different response categories in different sections of the instrument. Response categories are of three basic kinds. For one Likert-type format , the midpoint value of "3" reflected a response of "neutral" or that the respondent "neither agrees nor disagrees" with a given statement. In the second Likert format, the midpoint was less clearly a true neutral value—items, for instance, that sought to measure respondents' perception of the adequacy of a variety of resources that may be available to them, where a value of "3" signified "adequate." In the third category type, Frequency items, all items are on a 5-point scale. Frequency items delineated a range of frequencies with which respondents might experience an event (e.g., daily, once a month).

In all statistical analyses, we always used the actual numbers in the Likert scale (converting the 3 points to 5 points and reverse coding when appropriate). Means, standard deviations, and frequency distribution are presented for all tabled items. To make the process less cumbersome, we often collapse the 5 categories into 3. For example, in some items, "very satisfied" and "somewhat satisfied" are collapsed into "satisfied"; "very dissatisfied" and somewhat dissatisfied" are collapsed into "dissatisfied", whereas "neutral" remains one category.

Items were reverse coded if the preferred wording of items resulted in responses whose initial point values were in the opposite direction conceptually from the others. For example, for the item "I do not feel included in what goes on in the school", 1 means not feeling included and 5 means feeling greatly included. In the area of stress, a score of 1 means very little/infrequent stress and a score of 5 rare, infrequent stress. In the area of support, 5 means frequent or extremely helpful feedback, and 1 means not useful and/or rare feedback. *Thus, higher scores always indicate less isolation, greater satisfaction, lower stress, etc.*

4.2 Preliminary Analysis: Job Satisfaction

Since the entire survey could be conceived in a broad sense as a gauge of respondents' satisfaction with various aspects of their work and training, we began our preliminary analysis with items that asked special education teachers how satisfied they felt:

- with their choice of profession; and
- with their current teaching assignment.

The overwhelming majority—more than 85%—reported experiencing some degree of satisfaction with their work. Just under half of those who responded felt very satisfied with both their choice of career and their current positions. Table 4.2 summarizes the responses teachers gave to these two questions.

Table 4.2.1 Frequency Distribution for Global Satisfaction Items (N=298)

	very satisfied	somewhat satisfied	neutral	somewhat dissatisfied	very dissatisfied
How satisfied are you with your choice of profession?	50 %	37 %	6 %	4 %	3 %
How satisfied are you with your current teaching assignment?	48	37	3	8	4

Correlation Between Total Survey Score and Global Satisfaction Items. Each of the two Satisfaction items were correlated with the total score on the survey. We reasoned that the total score would be a measure of each special educators' overall satisfaction with a comprehensive multi-faceted view of her or his position. The two satisfaction items on the survey would be a more narrow view – inquiring as to satisfaction with the profession, and current assignment. We therefore expected significant but moderate correlations.

In fact, this is what we found. Correlations were .50 for satisfaction with the profession and .51 for satisfaction with current position assignment, both significant at the level of *p*=.001.

As another indicator of job satisfaction, we asked teachers: "If you could go back and start over again, how likely is it that you would choose to become a special education teacher?" Nearly two thirds (65%) said it was somewhat likely or very likely, and 16 percent said that chances were about 50-50. Approximately one in five (19%) said it was somewhat unlikely or very unlikely that they would make this choice.

4.3 Factor Analysis Methodology

Initially we considered using a set of *a priori* scales based on concepts from the literature. However, as we pursued this tactic, we noted a large number of items that could fall into two or more scales. Because of this conceptual overlap, it seemed advisable to not make these judgments on an *a priori* basis.

We also originally separated analyses of "Conditions of Work" items (e.g., quality of support from principal, adequacy of instructional materials) and affective items (e.g., sense of accomplishment with students, stress). However, as we pursued this line of inquiry, we also noted that some items did not easily fall into one or the other set. In reality, *we were always measuring perceptions* – not the actual technical quality of the feedback from the principal, but rather a person's sense of how adequate the feedback was and how well it met his or her needs. Thus, a factor analysis on the entire bank of 125 items seemed the best course to follow.

Extraction of Factors

Data from two urban districts with disparate demographics but similarly constructed samples were pooled for the factor analysis (n=524) in an effort to derive factors that would have the greatest possible external validity. (The third city was excluded because it did not include all special educators who taught students with disabilities in that city.) Preliminary replication of the factor analysis, conducted separately for the two districts, indicates a stable factor structure with slight differences in percent of variance explained by different factors.

The initial factor analysis on these data included all Likert-type items contained in the questionnaire. A total of 125 questionnaire items were included in the initial procedure. A second analysis was conducted in which items with simple correlations less than .30 with all other items were deleted. Eight items were deleted. After examining the results of the second procedure, the conceptual clarity of the resulting factors and their replicability across subsamples was not satisfactory and a third analysis was run. For this analysis, ten items were deleted that did not have simple correlations of at least .30 with a minimum of two other items.

From the final procedure utilizing the remaining 107 items, a total of 26 factors were extracted, thirteen of which constituted conceptually distinct clusters of 3 or more items that were identified for subsequent use in data analysis. Table 4.3 lists these 13 factors and the percent of explained variance attributable to each factor. Greater detail on each of these factors is incorporated into the tables and text that describe the results in the following section.

A coefficient alpha reliability was computed for each factor; they range from .69 to .92. These reliabilities are also presented in Section 4.4.

A factor correlation matrix was also computed. The matrix appears in Appendix A to this chapter. By and large, correlations between factors are weak, confirming that each factor measures a fairly distinct construct.

Table 4.3.1 Thirteen Major Factors

I. Relationships with Building Principal (19% of variance)
II. How Well Prepared Teacher Feels for Current Assignment (6%)
III. Central Office Relationships (6%)
IV. Stress Related to Job Design (4%)
V. Relationships with Fellow Teachers at School Site (3%)
VI. Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards (3%)
VII. Role Conflict (2%)
VIII. Affective Issues Related to Students (2%)
IX. Manageability of Workload (2%)
X. Parent Support (2%)
XI. Opportunities for Growth and Advancement (2%)
XII. Autonomy (2%)
XIII. Adequacy of Material Resources (2%)

4.4 Descriptive Results by Thirteen Major Factors

Data are presented and discussed in terms of the thirteen factors derived from the questionnaire on an item-by-item basis. These 13 factors account for 53% of the total variance. This section is organized as follows. First, three factors dealing with support relationships are discussed, followed by the Preparation factor, and Stress Related to Job Design and Workload Manageability. These first five factors are the most salient and therefore given the most attention. The final section briefly presents data from the remaining eight factors, focusing on three that seemed particularly interesting: Affective Issues Related to Students, Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards, and Role Conflict.

Support Factors

The explained variance for the three factors related to support from building principal, support from central office, and support/relationships with fellow teachers at the school site totaled 27.8%.

Relationships with Building Principal. For special education teachers, issues related to the principal seem to be key to understanding teachers' perceived satisfaction (Table 4.4.1). Of the cumulative explained variance of 53%, 18.7% is accounted for by this factor alone.

These special education teachers appeared relatively ambivalent (slightly better than neutral) about the quality of the support and feedback they received from their principals. Although many (70%) did feel "backed up" by their principals, fewer felt that the principal assisted them in specific problem-solving (only 60%) or integration efforts (only 57 %). Only half the teachers felt satisfied with the support and encouragement they received. In all likelihood, however, many principals probably have only minimal special education training.

About half felt the principal often recognized their good work; the other half felt this rarely. In most cases, feedback from the principal and vice principal was infrequent. Finally, although most special educators liked their current school (83%), only about half felt included in what went on in the school.

Table 4.4.1 Relationships with Building Principal

Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
83%	8%	9%	I really like the school in which I am currently working. [M=4.23; SD=1.05]
70	11	19	My principal backs me up when I need it. [3.84 (1.28)]
60	15	25	My principal (or vice principal) works with me to solve problems. [3.56 (1.31)]
57	18	25	My principal (or vice principal) actively assists my efforts to integrate students. [3.53 (1.35)]
62	10	28	I can count on my principal to provide appropriate assistance when a student's behavior requires it. [3.50 (1.39)]
53	16	31	I feel included in what goes on in this school. [3.45 (1.35)]
Very Much	**Somewhat**	**Very Little**	
34	41	25	How helpful is the feedback your receive from your principal or vice principal? [3.16 (1.53)]
45	32	23	To what extent does your building principal understand what you do? [3.35 (1.20)]
Satisfied	**Neutral**	**Dissatisfied**	
51	10	39	Satisfaction with quality of support and encouragement you receive. [3.15 (1.33)]
			Frequency
Daily/ Often	**Sometimes**	**Seldom/ Never**	
50	28	22	How often principal recognizes the good teaching you do. [3.33 (1.14)]
50	26	24	How often do you receive encouragement to try out new ideas? [3.25 (1.10)]
At Least Once /Mo.	**Several Xs/ Year**	**Once /Year or Less**	
32	40	28	How often do you receive feedback from your principal or vice principal? [3.15 (1.13)]

Reliability: $\alpha = .92$
Percent of variance explained=18.7%

Central Office Relationships. The third factor (see Table 4.4.2) accounts for 5.7% of total variance, with item means ranging from 2.61 to 3.70. These are among the lower scores in the survey.

Table 4.4.2 Central Office Relationships

Agree	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	
63%	22%	15%	The special education division supports me in my interactions with parents. [[M=3.70; SD=1.12]
52	18	30	A contact person from special education works with me to solve problems. 3.21(1.34)]
45	31	24	The special education division backs me up when I need it. [3.21 (1.22)]
Very Much	**Somewhat**	**Very Little**	
27	41	32	How helpful is the feedback you receive from your special education contact? [2.89 (1.53)]
58	25	17	To what extent do you feel your special education contact person understands what you do in your job? [3.57 (1.17)]
30	38	32	To what extent do you feel the district special education department understands what you do in your job? [2.93 (1.13)]
			Frequency
Almost Never/ Several Xs/Yr	**Once / Month**	**Weekly/ Daily**	
64	16	20	Frequency of stress due to lack of support from special education administration [3.64 (1.31)]
At Least Once a /Mo.	**Several Xs/Year**	**Once /Year or Less**	
27	27	46	How often do you receive feedback from your special education contact? [2.61 (1.40)]

Reliability: $\alpha = .87$
Percent of variance explained=5.7%

Item means suggest that, on average, teachers did not feel particularly well-supported by their district central office. The highest mean shows a moderate level of agreement that there was support for teachers' interactions with parents (M=3.70), but this kind of united front would perhaps be expected as an organizational response. There was a limited sense that special education contact persons understood teachers' jobs (M=3.57). The degree to which teachers felt the district special education department itself understood teachers' jobs is also quite low with a mean of 2.93. Only 30% felt the department understood their jobs well, and 32% not at all.

Teachers did not feel particularly "backed up" by the district; nor did they feel very positive about the specific problem-solving support available from the contact person (M=3.21), reflecting a certain "distance" between teachers and the central office.

Feedback from the special education contact was perceived as helpful by only one quarter of the teachers. It was also infrequent: between "several times a year" and "about once a year." The overall lack of support was rated as a frequent (weekly or daily) source of stress by one out of five teachers.

Relationships with Fellow Teachers at School Site (Table 4.4.3). Special education teachers reported that other teachers in their schools (those not in special education) generally did not understand very well what they do as special educators. Only 13% felt well understood by other teachers at their school. A full 60% agreed that most other teachers don't know what special education teachers do in their classrooms. Almost a third expressed dissatisfaction with their school staff's attitude toward special education, and only 54% felt satisfied.

This perceived lack of understanding, however, did not necessarily appear to translate to a perceived lack of appreciation. Most special educators felt other teachers valued what they had to offer; 66% said that other teachers at their school came to them for help or advice, and 63% said they shared materials with non-special education teachers at least once a month or more frequently.

While only half of the special education teachers indicated that other teachers provided them with feedback about how well they were doing, 78% reported that other teachers at least sometimes recognized the quality of their work.

Table 4.4.3 Relationships with Fellow Teachers at School Site

Agree	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	
60%	11%	29%	Most of the other teachers in this school don't know what I do in my classroom. [*reverse-coded,* M=2.59; SD=1.29]
66	15	19	Teachers at this school come to me for help or advice. [3.58 (1.16)]
50	22	28	My fellow teachers provide me with feedback about how well I am doing. [3.25 (1.26)]
Satisfied	**Neutral**	**Dissatisfied**	
54	15	31	Satisfaction with school staff's attitude toward special education [3.33 (1.28)]
Well	**Somewhat**	**Very Little**	
13	44	43	To what extent do teachers who are not in special education understand what you do? [2.62 (.92)]
			Frequency
Weekly/ Daily	**Once / Month**	**Almost Never/ Several Xs/Yr**	
42	21	37	How often do you share materials with teachers who are not in special education? [3.06 (1.40)]
Daily/ Often	**Sometimes**	**Seldom/ Never**	
36	42	22	Other teachers recognize the quality of my work. [3.16 (.94)]

Reliability: $\alpha = .80$
Percent of variance explained=3.4%

Preparation: How Well Prepared Teacher Feels for Current Assignment

For the *Preparation* factor, accounting for 6.1% of total variance, all but two of the items are drawn from a section of the questionnaire devoted to that area, where 1="not at all prepared", 3="adequately prepared", and 5= "very well prepared" (Table 4.4.4).

Note that the items in this factor refer to preparation generally, rather than to a specific area such as quality of university training experiences or district inservice. Note, too, that we intentionally referred to each teacher's current position. A teacher, for example, may feel well prepared to teach students with reading problems but may currently be assigned to a class of students with moderate to severe learning problems and therefore not feel prepared for his/her current assignment.

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Areas of preparation addressed included instructional techniques, curriculum modifications, behavior management, case management activities and paperwork, consulting with classroom teachers, collaborating with others, working with parents, supervising aides, responding to severity of student needs, and responding to diversity of student needs.

Scores on these items ranged from 3.69 to 4.11 suggesting that most of these teachers felt relatively well-prepared for critical aspects of their work. However, there was a group who did not feel prepared for some aspects of their current assignments.

Table 4.4.4 How Well Prepared Teacher Feels for Current Assignment

Well Prepared	**Adequately Prepared**	**Not at all Prepared**	**How well prepared do you feel for each of the following components of your job?**
77%	17%	6%	Instructional techniques [M=4.11; SD=.90]
76	19	5	Working with parents [4.10 (.91)]
60	25	15	Collaborating and/or consulting with classroom teachers [3.99 (.97)]
71	21	8	Collaborating with others (e.g., psychologists, social workers, etc.) [3.99 (.97)]
70	19	11	Responding to the severity of your students' learning needs [3.90 (.98)]
68	21	11	Responding to the diversity of your students' learning needs [3.90 (.97)]
70	21	9	Curriculum modification and/or development [3.92 (.97)]
69	21	10	Behavior management [3.89 (.99)]
61	24	15	Training and supervision of instructional aides [3.71 (1.19)]
55	30	15	Case management activities and corresponding paperwork [3.69 (1.11)]
Agree	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	
83	5	12	I have enough training/experience to deal with students' learning problems. [4.07 (.97)]
25	14	61	It's hard to know how I'm doing in my teaching [*Reverse coded*- 3.64 (1.25)]

Reliability: $\alpha=.91$
Percent of variance explained=6.1%

Eleven percent were not prepared to deal with the severity of their students learning needs or the diversity of the learning needs. Fifteen percent didn't feel prepared to collaborate with other teachers. Another group of approximately 20-30% felt just adequately prepared for key aspects of their jobs. The reader is reminded that, in terms of explained variance, the factor analysis indicated that how prepared a person feels for crucial aspects of her or his position was the second most powerful force in determining overall satisfaction.

The two areas where teachers felt most prepared were in "instructional techniques" (M=4.11, SD=.90) and "working with parents" (M=4.10), while the two areas in which they felt least prepared were "case management activities/paperwork" (M=3.69) and "collaborating/consulting with classroom teachers" (M=3.71). In addition, one fourth felt it was hard to know how they were doing in their teaching, indicating a need for more feedback than is currently provided.

Stress Related to Issues in Job Design and Workload Manageability

Table 4.4.5 shows that almost 40% of teachers felt their workload was not manageable – an alarming statistic. Two thirds of the sample said they frequently experienced stress due to this type of overload. Not unexpectedly, major sources of stress were bureaucratic requirements, behavior, and discipline.

Table 4.4.5 Stress Related to Job Design

Agree	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	
51%	10%	39%	My workload is manageable [M=3.13; SD=1.30]
Almost Never/ Several Xs/Yr	**Once/ Year**	**Weekly/ Monthly**	
27	16	57	How often do you feel under a great deal of stress? [2.56 (1.18)]
			Frequency with which you experience the following as sources of stress:
32	11	57	The severity of students' needs [2.60; 1.43]
28	14	58	Too great a range in the needs and abilities of students [2.50 (1.43)]
26	13	61	Student behavior and discipline problems [2.42 (1.39)]
15	16	69	Bureaucratic requirements— rules, regulations, paperwork [2.13 (1.11)]
17	15	68	Too much to do and too little time to do it [2.13 (1.26)]

Reliability: α =.87
Percent of variance explained=4.2%

The severity and diversity of student learning needs was also a frequent stressor. This is in all likelihood related to what administrators described as shifts in placements for special education students towards more of an inclusion approach, with increasing numbers of students placed in resource settings rather than self-contained classrooms or special schools, and an increased move to place students in neighborhood schools, regardless of the severity of the disability.

Manageability of Workload. A separate factor focused solely on the issue of workload (Table 4.6). Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which the stated aspect of workload affected workload manageability, using a scale where 1="greatly affects", 2="somewhat affects", and 3="does not affect."

Table 4.4.6 Factors Contributing to Manageability of Workload

Does Not Affect	Somewhat Affects	Greatly Affects	**Indicate the effect on your workload of the following items:**
11%	28%	61%	Total number of students you work with each week [M=2.00; SD=1.38]
10	27	63	Size of the group of students during a given block of time [1.93 (1.34)]
4	25	71	The number of things you are expected to do as part of your job [1.65 (1.09)]
4	22	74	Severity of students' needs [1.59 (1.06)]
3	20	77	Diversity of students' needs and abilities [1.52 (1.01)]

Reliability: α *=.79*
Percent of variance explained=1.8%

For each item, at least 60% felt that the designated issue greatly affected workload manageability. A strong majority of teachers felt both student diversity and severity of student needs contributed most strongly to workload manageability.

Other Factors

The following tables present results for three of the remaining factors. Appendix B to this chapter presents four additional factors.

Affective Issues Related to Students. These items (Table 4.4.7) are among the highest rated in the questionnaire, typical in research with teachers. Note that 83% felt satisfied with their accomplishments with students, and 85% felt they were making a significant difference in students' lives; 96% enjoyed their students.

On the other hand, 5% felt they made no significant difference in their students' lives and another 10% felt neutral about this issue. Fourteen percent

On the other hand, 5% felt they made no significant difference in their students' lives and another 10% felt neutral about this issue. Fourteen percent indicated no sense of accomplishment. In all likelihood, these were teachers confronting serious problems in their professional careers.

Table 4.4.7 Affective Issues Related to Students

Agree	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	
96%	2%	2%	I really enjoy my students [M=4.63; SD=.62]
85	10	5	I feel that I am making a significant difference in the lives of my students [4.22 (.90)]
80	14	6	I find that my relationships with students have gotten better over my years of teaching [4.21 (.95)]
13	5	82	When all factors are considered, spec. ed. teachers are not a powerful influence on students' achievement. [*reverse coded*, 4.17 (1.09)]
71	8	21	I have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began teaching. [3.77 (1.30)]
Satisfied	**Neutral**	**Dissatisfied**	
83	3	14	Satisfaction with sense of accomplishments with students [4.00 (1.02)]
			Frequency
Daily/ Often	**Some-times**	**Seldom/ Never**	
59	31	10	How often my students show that they appreciate me [3.73 (.98)]

Reliability: α *=.79*
Percent of variance explained=2.1%

Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards. Most teachers appeared satisfied with the profession (Table 4.4.8). There was a group of 14 percent who felt neutral or dissatisfied. Overall, the satisfaction rate was high for the items in Table 4.4.8, with the exception that 42 percent did not agree that there were many rewards for being a special educator, and one in five said that if they had the decision to make again, they would not choose special education teaching as a profession.

Table 4.4.8 Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards

Very/ Somewhat Satisfied	**Neutral**	**Very/ Somewhat Dissatisfied**	
87%	6%	7%	How satisfied are you with your choice of profession? [M=4.23; SD=.96]
Very/ Somewhat Likely	**Chances About Even**	**Very/ Somewhat Unlikely**	
69	14	17	If you could go back and do it over again, how likely is it that you would become a special education teacher? [3.90 (1.32)]
Agree	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	
14	11	75	I think the disappointments involved make special education teaching not worth it. [*reverse-coded*, 4.07 (1.13)]
77	11	12	One of the things I like about this job is that I'm always learning something new. [3.99 (1.07)]
32	10	58	There aren't many rewards for being a special educator [*reverse-coded*, 3.52 (1.39)]

Reliability: α*=.76*
Percent of variance explained=2.6%

Role Conflict. For these items (Table 4.4.9), response categories pertain to frequency of various possible work conflicts and are represented by a 5-point Likert scale where 1="always or almost always", 2="often", 3="sometimes", 4="seldom", and 5="never or almost never". Higher scores reflect a perception of lesser conflict about teaching role.

Overall, teachers indicated a moderate level of conflict concerning their day-to-day work experiences. The items with the least positive scores appear to concern conflict related more directly to students regarding issues of instruction and mainstreaming. Half the teachers felt conflict between devoting time to students versus collaborating with teachers. Almost three-fourths felt conflict between meeting students' needs and demands of the mainstream.

Interestingly, role conflict did not explain a high proportion of the variance. We believe this is because many of these conflicts are endemic to the profession of special education teaching. It is only when people do not feel supported by administrators and fellow teachers in grappling with these conflicts that they emerge as serious, all-encompassing problems.

Table 4.4.9 Role Conflict

Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Frequency with which you experience conflict in the following areas:
49%	27%	24%	Time spent working directly with students vs. with their classroom teachers [M=3.42; SD=1.23]
42	30	28	District Spec. Ed. division's expectations vs. building administrators' expectations [3.20 (1.23)]
28	32	40	Matching instruction to mainstream vs. meeting students' needs [2.85 (1.15)]
20	32	48	The way lessons are taught in the mainstream vs. what is effective with my students [2.67 (1.11)]
20	27	53	Attending to students' academic needs vs. their social/behavioral needs [2.60 (1.13)]

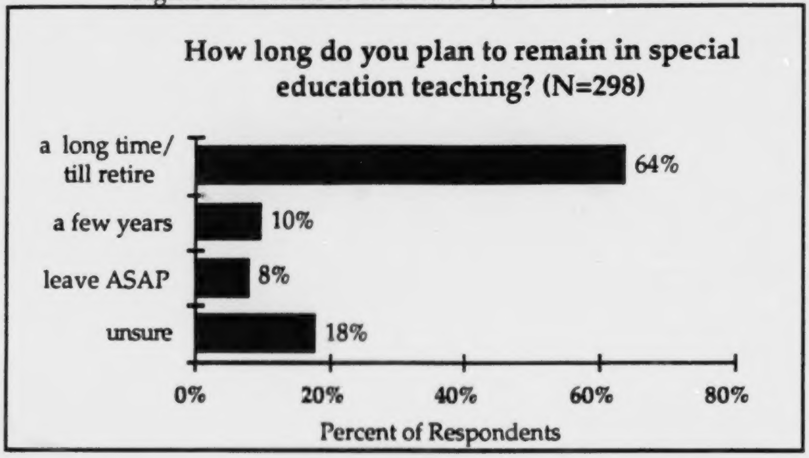
Reliability: $\alpha=.78$
Percent of variance explained=2.3%

4.5 Characteristics of District One Teachers Who Express An Intent To Leave

In the survey, we asked each special educator how long they planned to stay in *special education teaching*, as one means of gauging teachers' commitment to their work. At the time of completing the questionnaire nearly two thirds of District One respondents planned to stay for a long time or until retirement (Figure 4.5.1).

In contrast, approximately one in five would commit to no more than a few years, and 18 percent were unsure. As such, roughly 18% of the district's special education teaching force might be considered "at risk" for leaving within the next few years, and an additional 18% are unsure of how long they will continue.

Figure 4.5.1 Plans to Remain in Special Education



Intent to Leave as Basis for Comparison on Factors. For our between-group analyses using intent to leave as an independent variable, two groups were defined. The "intend to leave" group included teachers who expressed an intent to leave "ASAP" or "within a few years." The "intend to stay" group included teachers expressing an intent to stay "for a long time" or "until retirement."

Intent to leave is a frequently utilized variable in research on teacher satisfaction/teacher attrition and retention. Our attempt to analyze response patterns of this sample was not terribly productive, however, for one simple reason. Potential leavers differed significantly from those who intended to stay on virtually all factors, indicating that teachers who expressed an intent to leave special education as soon as possible or in a few years were generally less satisfied with and committed to their work than those who expressed an intention to remain for a long time or until retirement.

In fact, there were only two areas of non-significant differences. The first was adequacy of material resources. In this case, both the stayers and potential leavers appeared equally dissatisfied. Second, no difference was found in opportunities for professional growth and advancement. On every other facet of work – relationships with principals, central office, parents and fellow teachers, perceived stress related to job design, relationships with students – this sample was significantly more dissatisfied.

The correlation between intent to leave and satisfaction with the special education profession was -.38, significant at the .001 level. The correlation between intent to leave and satisfaction with current assignment was -.32, also significant at the .001 level. (This is quite similar to the correlation of -.33 found by Cross and Billingsley [1993].)

Sample Characteristics of Intent to Leave. Table 4.5.2 compares the two groups with respect to age, years in special education teaching, and total years teaching experience. Teachers in the "Intend to Leave" group were younger and less experienced than those in the "Intend to Stay" group. They had been special education teachers for fewer years and had spent a shorter time in the teaching profession, on average, than had teachers in the "Intend to Stay" group.

The two groups also differed substantially on gender. While 15% of the 190 teachers intending to stay were male, 33% of the 49 teachers intending to leave were male. A chi-square test showed this difference to be significant ($\chi^2(1) = 7.71$, $p = .01$). On other variables such as teaching environment, grade level, and percent of students receiving free/reduced lunch at the teachers' home schools, the two groups did not differ significantly. Table 4.5.3 gives the breakdown of these variables by category of Intent.

Table 4.5.2 Significant Characteristics of Potential Leavers and Stayers

	Intend to Stay			Intend to Leave				
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	t	p
Age	188	45.32	8.25	49	41.33	6.71	3.12	.002
Years as a special education teacher	188	12.97	6.04	49	10.39	5.40	2.72	.007
Total years teaching experience	174	16.29	7.13	46	13.13	5.85	2.76	.006

Teachers in low income schools (60% and more free/reduced lunch) appear somewhat more likely to leave (41.3% vs. 27.3% of stayers), but this difference is not significant.

Table 4.5.3 Characteristics of Those Who Intend to Leave (N=49) and Stay (N=190)

	Intend to Stay	Intend to Leave	χ^2	p
Percent Males	15.3	32.7	7.71	.01
Teaching Environment	%	%	4.31	NS
Resource	57.4	55.1		
Self Contained	28.9	36.7		
Special School	10.0	2.0		
Itinerant/Other	3.7	6.1		
Grade Level	%	%	4.15	NS
Preschool	4.2	2.0		
Elementary	42.1	51.0		
Middle	14.7	20.4		
High	24.2	18.4		
Other/combo	14.7	8.2		
Students Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch 1991-92	n=176 %	n=46 %		
0 -20%	14.2	13.0	5.30	NS
21 - 40%	15.9	19.6		
41 - 60%	42.6	26.1		
61 - 80%	16.5	26.1		
81 - 100%	10.8	15.2		

Relationship Between Intent to Leave and Subsequent Employment Status. Table 4.5.4 depicts relationships between expressed intent to leave at the time of survey completion in April 1992 and actual job status fifteen months (two school years) following survey completion. The relationship is significant (χ^2=41.4 (5), p <.00001). The strongest aspects of this relationship are evident for respondents who indicated they intended to leave "as soon as possible" and those who intended to stay either "for a few years" or "until retirement."

Of 23 teachers who indicated they intended to leave "as soon as possible," almost half (44%) actually left within 15 months. Of 31 who expressed an intent to stay "for a few years," 16% had left after two years.

Conversely, only 6% of those who planned to stay "for a long time" left, and only 1% of those younger than 55 who said they planned to stay "until retirement" left. Thus there appears to be a reasonable, if less than perfect, relationship between intended plans and actual subsequent job status.

Another useful way to examine the congruence between intent to leave and actual job status is to look only at the 33 leavers. Of the 33 teachers who actually did leave within two years, 10 (30%) had expressed an intent to leave as soon as possible, 8 (24%) were over age 55 and had expressed an intent to stay until retirement, and 5 (15%) had intended to stay for just a few years more. Overall, of 33 teachers who actually left, a total of 23 (69%) expressed an intent to leave that was consistent with their subsequent job status. Thus, these data suggest that, over a period of 1 to 2 years, the intent-to-leave variable may be a useful indicator of subsequent leaver status.

Table 4.5.4 Relationship Between District One Teachers' Intent to Leave and Job Status Two School Years Later

	Actual Job Status in September 1993					
Expressed Intent in April 1992	Stayed (N=263)		Left (N=33)		χ^2	p
	N	%	N	%		
Leave as soon as possible	13	56%	10	44%	41.37	<.00001
Stay for a few years	26	84%	5	16%		
Stay for a long time	44	94%	3	6%		
Stay until retirement (aged 55 or older)	29	78%	8	22%		
Stay until retirement (under age 55)	105	99%	1	1%		
Unsure (N=52)	46	88%	6	12%		

4.6 Comparison of Leavers and Stayers on Factor Scores

In this analysis, leavers are defined as teachers who left special education wholly or largely for work-related reasons. Of 17 special education teachers who left, 14 fit this definition.

A MANOVA was conducted on all factor scores, comparing leavers to stayers. Due to the relatively small and heterogeneous nature of the work-related leaver sample with complete data available for the analysis (N leavers=10, N stayers=226), statistical power was low. The MANOVA indicated no significant difference between the groups [Wilks $\lambda = .92$, df = (13, 212), $p=.09$]. However, since results border on significance, several exploratory findings will be discussed based on univariate F-ratios.

Comparing factor scores of the two groups, leavers had significantly lower scores on three factors:

- stress related to job design ($p < .01$),
- satisfaction and personal assessment of rewards ($p < .01$), and
- affective issues related to students ($p < .05$).

These results are presented in Tables 4.6.1 to 4.6.3, presenting scores for each item within each of these factors with discussion of key differences.

Stress Related to Job Design (Table 4.6.1). Only a few of the items within this factor reflect greater stress for leavers. Almost eighty percent of leavers indicated that they felt under a great deal of stress on a weekly or daily basis, compared to just over half of stayers. Twice as many stayers as leavers (28% versus 14%) reported only infrequent stress ($p = .01$). Similar discrepancies are evident in the case of stress due to the range of students' needs and abilities ($p=.01$). Leavers also reported much more frequent stress due to bureaucratic requirements ($p=.03$) and conflicting expectations, goals, and directives.

In spite of these results, however, there were several areas in which the two groups were not significantly different, including their perceptions of stress due to student behavior and discipline problems, and stress due to severity of student needs. It is also interesting that in spite of the high relative frequency of the stress experienced by both groups, and the greater degree of stress in a number of areas for leavers, the two groups were not significantly different in the extent to which they felt their workload was manageable. Almost half of leavers and slightly more than half of stayers felt their workload was manageable. Note also that relatively few respondents expressed neutral feelings on this item. It is worth considering that even though teachers in general may indicate they experience frequent stress, they may expect their work to be relatively stressful.

Table 4.6.1 Stress Related to Job Design:
Percentage Responses of Leavers (n=14) vs. Stayers (n=282)

	Mean	SD	p	Frequency Rating	Almost Never/ Several XYr	Once/ Month	Weekly/ Daily
Leavers	1.86	1.10	.01	How often do you feel under a great deal of stress?	14%	7%	79%
Stayers	2.59	1.18			28	17	56
Leavers	1.64	1.15	.01	Stress: too great a range in the needs and abilities of students.	7	7	86
Stayers	2.54	1.44			30	14	57
Leavers	1.57	.85	.03	Stress: bureaucratic requirements— rules, regulations, paperwork?	0	21	79
Stayers	2.17	1.11			16	16	68
Leavers	2.77	1.24	ns	Stress: conflicting expectations, goals, directives .	31	23	46
Stayers	3.28	1.28			47	25	29
Leavers	2.43	1.56	ns	Stress: the severity of students' needs.	21	14	64
Stayers	2.61	1.43			33	11	57
Leavers	2.07	1.39	ns	Stress: student behavior and discipline problems.	14	7	79
Stayers	2.44	1.40			27	13	60
Leavers	1.86	1.29	ns	Stress: too much to do and too little time to do it.	21	7	71
Stayers	2.14	1.26			18	15	67
				Likert Scale	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**
Leavers	2.93	1.21	ns	My workload is manageable.	50	7	43
Stayers	3.14	1.30			52	10	39

Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards (Table 4.6.2). This factor reflects greater differences between leavers and stayers than any other factor . Leavers were less satisfied with their choice of profession (p =.001), and were they to start their careers over again, leavers would be much less likely to consider becoming special education teachers (p =.01).

Table 4.6.2 Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards
Percentage Responses of Leavers (n=14) vs. Stayers (n=282)

					Very/Somewhat Satisfied	Neutral	Very/Somewhat Dissatisfied
Leavers	3.50	1.29	.001	How satisfied are you with your choice of profession?	64	7	29
Stayers	4.31	.92			88	6	6
	Mean	SD	p	Likert Scale	Very/Somewhat Likely	Chances About Even	Very/Somewhat Unlikely
Leavers	3.14	1.46	.01	If you could go back and do it over again, how likely is it that you would become a special education teacher?	43%	29%	29%
Stayers	3.95	1.29			70	14	16
					Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Leavers	3.50	1.46	.03	The disappointments involved make special education teaching not really worth it	21	21	57
Stayers	4.10	1.10			13	11	76
Leavers	2.85	1.63	.03	There aren't many rewards for being a special educator	46	15	39
Stayers	3.56	1.37			31	10	60
Leavers	3.50	1.29	.04	One of the things I like about this job is that I'm always learning something new.	64	7	29
Stayers	4.02	1.06			77	11	12

Three-quarters of stayers disagreed with the statement that special education teaching was not really worth it, given the disappointments involved, while just over half of leavers expressed similar views (p=.03). When asked whether they agreed that their jobs always offered something new to learn, only 12% of stayers disagreed, while over twice that number of leavers disagreed.

Affective Issues Related to Students (Table 4.6.3). Overall mean values for both leavers and stayers were relatively high on this factor, suggesting that all teachers have largely positive feelings toward their students. However, stayers' scores were also consistently higher, strikingly so on some variables, as when asked about their perceived effectiveness in making a significant difference in the lives of their students (p =.007). Seventy-one percent of leavers felt they were making a significant difference, compared to 86% of stayers; and twenty-nine percent of leavers felt they were not, compared to just 4% of stayers.

Table 4.6.3 Affective Issues Related to Students:
Percentage Responses of Leavers (n=14) vs Stayers (n=282)

	Mean	SD	p	Likert Scale	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Leavers	3.64	1.65	.007	I feel that I am making a significant difference in the lives of my students	71%	0%	29%
Stayers	4.25	.84			86	11	4
Leavers	3.14	1.46	.03	I have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began teaching.	43	29	29
Stayers	3.80	1.29			72	7	21
Leavers	4.43	.85	ns	I really enjoy my students	93	0	7
Stayers	4.64	.61			97	2	2
Leavers	3.93	1.20	ns	When all factors are considered, spec. ed. teachers are not a powerful influence on students' achievement.	21	7	71
Stayers	4.19	1.08			12	5.	83
Leavers	4.00	1.36	ns	I find that my relationships with students have gotten better over my years of teaching	64	21	14
Stayers	4.22	.93			81	14	6
					Satisfied	**Neutral**	**Dissatis**
Leavers	3.86	1.10	ns	Satisfaction: sense of accomplishments with students	79	0	21
Stayers	4.01	1.03			83	4	14
				Frequency Rating	**Daily/ Often**	**Sometimes**	**Seldom/ Never**
Leavers	3.50	1.23	ns	My students show that they appreciate me	50	21	29
Stayers	3.75	.97			59	32	9

Less than half of stayers indicated they had as much enthusiasm as they did when they began teaching, while almost three-quarters of stayers expressed that opinion (p=.03). Quite high percentages of both groups said that they enjoyed their students. Although not significantly different, leavers tended to feel less appreciated by their students than stayers, 29% versus 9% respectively.

4.7 Summary of Survey Results

Some of the issues of concern to teachers in this study, such as questions of salary and benefits, are not surprising and their resolution not easily addressed in a time of shrinking budgets. Many others, however, appear to be issues of support and organizational approach. With some concerted effort and serious planning involving special education teachers, some progress may be made in these areas.

The emphasis of this summary is not on comparative results for different subsamples, but on some of the key points that emerged from the survey results for all teachers , including:

- perceptions, by some, of limited support and understanding from the building principal, the district central office, and fellow teachers;
- preparation for teaching and opportunities for professional growth;
- sources of job stress.

Even though many teachers expressed a certain degree of conflict about their role and duties with respect to students and the administration, a pivotal factor in understanding overall job satisfaction is the extent to which teachers feel supported in various ways by the principal, the central office, and by their relationships with other teachers. The factor correlation matrix (Appendix A to this chapter) shows that support from the principal is only somewhat correlated with support from the central office ($\underline{r}$=.28), and, as would be expected, it is moderately well aligned with relationships with other teachers ($\underline{r}$=.52). Both building level and central office support appear to be especially critical.

Seventy percent of teachers feel backed up by the principal in general, but roughly a quarter do not feel they are assisted in solving problems related to integration or student behavior, and only one-third feel they receive helpful feedback from the principal or vice principal.

Only half of the special education teaching force are satisfied with the quality of support and encouragement they receive. Only 13% feel that other teachers in their building understand well what special education teachers do. These figures suggest the potential for improvements in the ways in which feedback and problem-solving assistance are delivered to teachers and in the extent to which special education teachers feel included in their schools, areas over which districts may exert significant influence at both the building and central office levels.

Overall, teachers appear to feel relatively well-prepared for their work, but there are areas in which a persistent 10-15% indicate they have received minimal or no preparation for their present positions, including collaboration, supervision, paperwork responsibilities, and responding to the diversity of students' needs.

These problems may be due to an increase in diversity of student populations related to changes in organizational approach, such as move more toward inclusion, involving more diverse students assigned to the same teacher. There would most certainly be change related to demographic shifts that have increased cultural and ethnic diversity and raised additional considerations related to the intersection of special education and language minority students. Finally, these results may be due to reassignment decisions in the face of budget-related reductions in work force.

Shifts such as these are likely to be an increasing concern, and could provide useful direction for ongoing professional development needs that may not be currently addressed.

Only half of these teachers agree that their workload is manageable, 68% feel they have too little time to do their work, and almost one-third find conflicting goals, expectations, and directives a frequent source of stress. Once again, the diversity and severity of students' needs also emerges as a source of weekly or daily stress for over half. This may reflect inadequacies of past preparation, although as noted above, most teachers indicated their initial career preparation experiences were at least adequate. It may instead be more indicative of ongoing district professional development needs. It is highly significant that over half of respondents did not feel there were many opportunities to learn new techniques and strategies in their district.

Almost half of the teachers surveyed indicated they were very satisfied both with special education teaching as a profession and with their current assignment, and another third said they were somewhat satisfied. Only 13 percent indicated they were either somewhat or very dissatisfied with their current assignment. On the surface, this would not seem to be a sign of deep problems. However, when queried about specific aspects of their jobs, many teachers are less sanguine. More than half express at least some dissatisfaction with instructional materials and supplies, the prestige of the profession in the community, and salary and benefits. This suggests that, overall, teachers value the vocation of special education teaching as a profession, but have serious discontents concerning some of the conditions of work they experience. It is important to emphasize, however, that in spite of any discontents, teachers' feelings towards their students remain overwhelmingly positive.

In the survey, we asked each special educator how long they planned to stay in special education teaching, as one means of gauging teachers' commitment to their work. At the time of completing the questionnaire, nearly two thirds of the respondents planned to stay for a long time or until retirement. However, almost one in five said they planned to leave special education either as soon as possible or in a few years, and another 18% were unsure of their plans. It is important to note too, that only 30% of those who expressed an intent to leave "as soon as possible" actually left that summer. As has been pointed out by LeCompte and Dworkin (1991), intent to leave is not the same as actual leaving. However, as they also point out, when individuals who express a preference to leave continue instead to teach, it may reflect a degree of burnout and constitute a special source of concern.

Comparisons conducted between those who actually left for work-related reasons and those who stayed did not result in significant differences. However, this lack of significance may be due to the low power of the statistics tests due to small sample size.

Appendix 4.A

Factor Correlation Matrix

Table A.1 Factor Correlation Matrix

	PRIN	PREP	CENT_OFF	STRESS	TEACHERS	COMMIT	CONFLICT	STUDENTS	WORKLOAD	PARENTS	GROWTH	AUTONOMY	RESOURCE
PRIN		.	.		.	.	.	.	.	.		.	.
PREP	.1661**		.		.	.	.	.	.	.		.	.
CENT_OFF	.2796**	.0771	.		.	.	.	.	.	.		.	.
STRESS	.1603**	.2702**	.3249**		.	.	.	.	.	.		.	.
TEACHERS	.5186**	.3171**	.1468*	.1349*		.	.	.	.	.		.	.
COMMIT	.3668**	.2651**	.2472**	.4018**	.3552**	.	.	.	.	.		.	.
CONFLICT	.2063**	.2087**	.1379*	.4576**	.1980**	.2122**	.	.	.	.		.	.
STUDENTS	.2853**	.4262**	.0903	.3656**	.3346**	.5929**	.2685**	.	.	.		.	.
WORKLOAD	.0165	.0980	.2027**	.4475**	.0178	.1175*	.2556**	.1139	.	.		.	.
PARENTS	.2892**	.2843**	.2098**	.3313**	.2910**	.3608**	.2677**	.4608**	.1545**			.	.
GROWTH	.4406**	.1752**	.4129**	.2853**	.2855**	.3173**	.3386**	.1303*	.1459*	.2487**		.	.
AUTONOMY	.4105**	.2462**	.2701**	.3615**	.3045**	.4334**	.2805**	.3513**	.1490*	.2033**	.2932**	.	.
RESOURCE	.2828**	.1689**	.2988**	.3726**	.2567**	.2031**	.2926**	.1579**	.1352*	.3033**	.3411**	.3140**	.

* - Signif. LE .05   ** - Signif. LE .01   (2-tailed)

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Appendix 4.B

Additional Factors

Table 4.B.1 Parent Support

Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	
39%	14%	47%	Satisfaction with parent support [M=2.86; SD=1.22]
Well	Somewhat	Very Little	
28%	48%	24%	To what extent do the parents of your students understand what you do? [3.07 (.87)]
			Frequency
Daily/Often	Sometimes	Seldom/Never	
56%	31%	13%	My students' parents support what I am doing. [3.49 (.88)]

Reliability: α = .73
Percent of variance explained=1.8

Table 4.B.2 Opportunities for Growth and Advancement

Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	
46%	11%	43%	Satisfaction with opportunities for professional learning and growth [3.01 (1.28)]
28	26	46	Satisfaction with opportunities for professional advancement and promotion [2.73 (1.15)]
Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
31%	16%	53%	In this district I have many opportunities to learn new techniques and strategies. [M=2.61; SD=1.32]

Reliability: α = .77
Percent of variance explained=1.6

Table 4.B.3 Autonomy

Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
72%	9%	19%	I have control over aspects of my job that I consider most important to getting it done well. [M=3.80; SD=1.22]
83	5	12	I am allowed to use curricula that best meet the needs of my students. [4.17 (1.05)]
90	4	6	I have freedom within limits: I know what is expected of me but I also can be creative. [4.41 (.94)]

Reliability: α = .70
Percent of variance explained=1.6

Table 4.B.4 Adequacy of Material Resources

More Than Adequate	Adequate	Less Than Adequate	
33%	34%	33%	How adequate is the instructional space provided to you [M=2.94; SD=1.15]
16	31	53	How adequate is the instructional materials and supplies provided to you [2.50 (1.00)]
			Frequency
Almost Never/	Once/	Weekly/	
Several Times/Year		Month	Daily
43%	17%	40%	Stress due to inadequate resources to do a good job (materials, aide time, equipment, space) [3.00 (1.28)]

Reliability: α = .69
Percent of variance=1.5

Teachers' Perceptions of Working Conditions:
Problems Relating to Central Office Support

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Teachers' Perceptions of Working Conditions: Problems Related to Central Office Support

In each of the districts, teacher satisfaction, commitment, and intent to leave were all highly associated with administrative support. Interestingly, however, building support and central office support were not often highly correlated with each other. In one district, the correlation was low as .28, suggesting that teachers experience these two sources of support in distinct ways.

The following summarizes major findings relating to teachers perceptions of *central office support*.

Perceived Administrative Distance

Many teachers perceive that central office administrators do not adequately understand and/or value what teachers do in their jobs on a daily basis. Negative perceptions are exacerbated by limited contact. Some teachers reported that, after several years of employment, they had not even met many key central office staff.

Lack of contact with higher level administration was problematic largely because teachers believed that judgments or decisions were being made about their work that were not adequately informed. In one district, only 30% felt the special education department understood their jobs well, and 32% *not at all*. This sense of being *managed from a distance* left many teachers feeling misunderstood, undervalued, and powerless to effect change. As one teacher put it:

> "Special education teachers' hands are tied, they can do nothing, because they have to answer to people who never see the children . . . and yet make significant decisions for them."

Teachers perceptions of the quality and usefulness of their interactions with their central office *contacts* or *supervisors* tended to be slightly more positive in some districts. On average, between 75 and 90% of teachers agree or somewhat agree that their special education supervisor understands their program and/or what they do in their job. In the district with the highest ratings of central office support, as high as 87% of teachers report that their supervisor "has my respect and trust." Three quarters agree that their supervisor "attends to my feelings and needs" and "supports my actions and ideas."

However, not all district supervisors received such high ratings. In one district, only 19% felt that the feedback from their special ed contact was helpful, and 46% not at all. It was also highly infrequent — a full 43% of teachers reported "never" receiving feedback from their central office contact.

When contacts *were* made, teachers often perceived these visits to be highly reactive in nature. Teachers indicated that administrators tended to focus on *monitoring their work* or unilaterally implementing quick-fix solutions to problems rather than on *proactively providing assistance* or coaching to help them successfully accomplish their work.

> I feel that they do not know what we do or care what we do — unless there's parents bitching. And then all of a sudden they just want to settle the conflict. They don't care what's going on, just settle it. I just don't feel like we're 'together for children.' So the teachers try hard. But you can't do it if you don't have support all the way up.

One teacher captured the feelings of several when she claimed that the central office were "like the police out there to make sure that I didn't qualify anybody who didn't meet the strict standards of the district." Another simply felt at a loss for what the role of the central office really was.

> I'm coming down hard on them, I guess, because I really never got handle on what they were supposed to do (referring to program specialists and central office staff). They certainly didn't help me.

Perceived Dissonance in Priorities and Values

Positive perceptions of central office support may depend on whether central office staff effectively communicate directions for special education that make sense to teachers and that incorporate teachers' core values and priorities — namely planning for and providing effective instruction to students with disabilities.

Many special educators reported at times that they felt at odds with the policies and directions advanced by their central offices. In one district, for example, over half of the teachers indicated in a survey that they had to follow policies and procedures that were in conflict with their best professional judgment. Forty-five percent thought that there was not widespread agreement in the district regarding objectives for special education students. In two other districts, almost half of the teachers disagreed with district goals and objectives for improving special education programs.

Teachers usually formed perceptions about administrative values and priorities, not based on direct discussion with administrators, *but rather on their interpretations of administrative decisions and/or actions taken over time.* For example, when administrators recognized special education faculty for meeting paperwork goals, while providing little recognition to teachers' for their successes with students, teachers often interpreted this to mean that administrators prioritize or value legal compliance over making meaningful strides with students. As one teacher recalled:

> We would get reinforced for completing our IEPs by certain dates, and didn't matter if I had gotten 13 kids out of the self-contained in the past three years. They never recognized that. A social worker might, but the administration as a whole, no.

In one district, teachers reported receiving a packet of "pencils and stickers" from the special education division as kudos for meeting paperwork goals. This type of response, when coupled with the absence of positive feedback regarding teachers' student-related achievements, not only felt condescending, but was perceived as a conflict in values by teachers and led to heightened feeling of frustration and stress.

> And they sent me my little packet of pencils. What a joke. To have new forms every year . . . and here I begged for computers for my kids.

> I didn't feel that people were backing up the students' needs. But that they were covering their legal behinds.

Additionally, teachers reported believing that administrative decisions were based largely on economic criteria with little regard for what is best for children. Again, teachers drew these conclusions from their interpretations of decisions made by administrators and not from any discussion between the two parties regarding the underlying values giving rise to these administrative decisions.

> They're looking at figures and money on paper. And they see that, "Oh, this program takes a teacher, an aide, and an interpreter. Wow! That's a lot of money! Let's cut that one out."

> I see people putting kids in slots and not really even caring if it's the right slot. It's just like they come in and we're going to stick 'em over here, and nobody cares. I don't see any caring from the administration now as to what's happening with these kids. And I don't think anybody's saying, "Hey! We're in this for the kids!"

In one case, a teacher discussed her conflict in values as they became evident through a conversation with one of her administrators:

> I've even had the administration tell me to my face, "We are only required to do the minimum. We don't have to do a maximum. We just have to do what the law says." Period. That's it. Anything more, and there's no support for it. They draw the line right there. I mean, there's no vision for what a good special education department does. There's no good vision for what good teachers do.

The infrequent contact with central office staff in most districts and the lack of ongoing substantive discussion with administrators regarding what influences their decisions, led teachers to draw their own conclusions. Often teachers assumed an "us" versus "them" relationship, believing that their fundamental values for special education competed directly with those of the central office.

Directions for Addressing Problems in Central Office-Teacher Relations: Bridging the Understanding Gap

While there are no exact formulas for improving central office-teacher relations, we feel that there are at least two important areas to consider. Each are briefly stated below and covered in more detail in district strategic action planning reports.

- Expand opportunities for meaningful and relevant information exchange between central office staff and teachers. Central office-teacher relations would benefit from increased communication regarding central office and teacher values, priorities, district policy and rationale. Teachers' concerns express an urgent need for districts to expand opportunities for meaningful exchange of ideas and relevant information *particularly it relates to special education policy and the realities of teachers' day to day work.*

- Expand opportunities for professional development and learning. Many teachers spoke at length about their innovations in teaching and/or program design. Often these achievements, as perceived by the teacher, were based on long-term, self-initiated efforts. With frequency, teachers reported dissatisfaction with the amount of recognition they received for such work, often making statements to the effect that "nobody even noticed." In one district close to half of the teachers were dissatisfied with the opportunities for professional learning and growth available to them. Teachers often saw arrangement of these possibilities as the responsibility of the central office.

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Teachers' Perceptions of Working Conditions:

Section 2: Administrative Support

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Paper presented at National Dissemination Forum on Issues Relating to
Special Education Teacher Satisfaction, Retention, and Attrition
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Teachers' Perceptions of Working Conditions:
Section 2: Impact of Administrative Support on Job Satisfaction, Commitment, and Intent to Leave.

This summary report presents an integration of major findings on teachers' perceptions of working conditions based on survey and interview data from special educators in six large urban districts located throughout the country. In this section we focus on special educators' perceptions of administrative support at two levels: building and central office.

Administrative support is a multidimensional concept, involving a variety of attitudes and actions. In each of the districts, teacher satisfaction, commitment, and intent to leave were all highly associated with administrative support.

Interestingly, however, building support and central office support were not often highly correlated with each other. In one district, the correlation was low as .28, suggesting that teachers experience these two sources of support in distinct ways.

The following is a brief summary of major findings relating to teachers' perceptions of building and central office support.

Central Office Support

Many teachers perceive that central office administrators do not adequately understand and/or value what teachers do in their jobs on a daily basis. Negative perceptions are exacerbated by limited contact. Some teachers reported that, after several years of employment, they had not even met many key central office staff.

Lack of contact with higher level administration was problematic largely because teachers believed that judgments or decisions were being made about their work that were not adequately informed. In one district, only 30% felt the special education department understood their jobs well, and 32% *not at all.* This sense of being *managed from a distance* left many teachers feeling misunderstood, undervalued, and powerless to effect change. As one teacher put it:

> "Special education teachers' hands are tied, they can do nothing, because they have to answer to people who never see the children . . . and yet make significant decisions for them."

Teachers perceptions of the quality and usefulness of their interactions with their central office *contacts* or *supervisors* tended to be slightly more positive in some districts. On average, between 75 and 90% of teachers agree or somewhat agree that their special education supervisor understands their program and/or what they do in their job. In the district with the highest ratings of central office support, as high as 87% of teachers report that their supervisor "has my respect and trust." Three quarters agree that their supervisor "attends to my feelings and needs" and "supports my actions and ideas."

However, not all district supervisors received such high ratings. In one district, only 19% felt that the feedback from their special ed contact was helpful, and 46% not at all. It was also highly infrequent — a full 43% of teachers reported "never" receiving feedback from their central office contact.

When contacts *were* made, teachers often perceived these visits to be highly reactive in nature. Teachers indicated that administrators tended to focus on *monitoring their work* or unilaterally implementing quick-fix solutions to problems rather than on *proactively providing assistance* or coaching to help them successfully accomplish their work.

> I feel that they do not know what we do or care what we do — unless there's parents bitching. And then all of a sudden they just want to settle the conflict. They don't care what's going on, just settle it. I just don't feel like we're 'together for children.' So the teachers try hard. But you can't do it if you don't have support all the way up.

One teacher captured the feelings of several when she claimed that the central office were "like the police out there to make sure that I didn't qualify anybody who didn't meet the strict standards of the district." Another simply felt at a loss for what the role of the central office really was.

> I'm coming down hard on them, I guess, because I really never got handle on what they were supposed to do (referring to program specialists and central office staff). They certainly didn't help me.

Positive perceptions of central office support may depend on whether central office staff effectively communicate directions for special education that make sense to teachers and that incorporate teachers' core values and priorities — namely planning for and providing effective instruction to students with disabilities.

Many special educators reported at times that they felt at odds with the policies and directions advanced by their central offices. In one district, for example, over half of the teachers indicated in a survey that they had to follow policies and procedures that were in conflict with their best professional judgment. Forty-five percent thought that there was not widespread agreement in the district regarding objectives for special education students. In two other districts, almost half of the teachers disagreed with district goals and objectives for improving special education programs.

Teachers usually formed perceptions about administrative values and priorities, not based on direct discussion with administrators, *but rather on their interpretations of administrative decisions and/or actions taken over time.* For example, when administrators recognized special education faculty for meeting paperwork goals, while providing little recognition to teachers' for their successes with students, teachers often interpreted this to mean that administrators prioritize or value legal compliance over making meaningful strides with students. As one teacher recalled:

> We would get reinforced for completing our IEPs by certain dates, and didn't matter if I had gotten 13 kids out of the self-contained in the past three years. They never recognized that. A social worker might, but the administration as a whole, no.

In one district, teachers reported receiving a packet of "pencils and stickers" from the special education division as kudos for meeting paperwork goals. This type of response, when coupled with the absence of positive feedback regarding teachers' student-related achievements, not only felt condescending, but was perceived as a conflict in values by teachers and led to heightened feeling of frustration and stress.

> And they sent me my little packet of pencils. What a joke. To have new forms every year . . . and here I begged for computers for my kids.
>
> I didn't feel that people were backing up the students' needs. But that they were covering their legal behinds.

Additionally, teachers reported believing that administrative decisions were based largely on economic criteria with little regard for what is best for children. Again, teachers drew these conclusions from their interpretations of decisions made by administrators and not from any discussion between the two parties regarding the underlying values giving rise to these administrative decisions.

> They're looking at figures and money on paper. And they see that, "Oh, this program takes a teacher, an aide, and an interpreter. Wow! That's a lot of money! Let's cut that one out."
>
> I see people putting kids in slots and not really even caring if it's the right slot. It's just like they come in and we're going to stick 'em over here, and nobody cares. I don't see any caring from the administration now as to what's happening with these kids. And I don't think anybody's saying, "Hey! We're in this for the kids!"

In one case, a teacher discussed her conflict in values as they became evident through a conversation with one of her administrators:

> I've even had the administration tell me to my face, "We are only required to do the minimum. We don't have to do a maximum. We just have to do what the law says." Period. That's it. Anything more, and there's no support for it. They draw the line right there. I mean, there's no vision for what a good special education department does. There's no good vision for what good teachers do.

The infrequent contact with central office staff in most districts and the lack of ongoing substantive discussion with administrators regarding what influences their decisions, led teachers to draw their own conclusions. Often teachers assumed an "us" versus "them" relationship, believing that their fundamental values for special education competed directly with those of the central office.

Building Administrator Support

For special education teachers, issues related to the principal are key to understanding perceived satisfaction and commitment to special education teaching.

In discussing the influence that building administrators can have, one teacher stated it simply: "The principal really does make a difference. I've worked with a lot of different ones, and it matters. The personal philosophy of a site administrator can make such a difference in how a teacher will either blossom and create, or feel stifled and subjugated." Teachers' concerns related frequently to:

- a lack of understanding of what teachers do in their classrooms;
- failure to recognize the significance of teachers' work challenges and accomplishments and include them in the life of the school;
- inadequate levels of assistance with specific problems, such as discipline or integration efforts;
- reluctance to involve teachers in determining the shape of the school's special education programs.

In one district, 25% of the special education faculty are dissatisfied with the extent to which their principals understand what they do in their classroom. In an interview, one teacher reported that her principal did not understand her students' needs or capabilities and failed to recognize the significance of her work challenges and accomplishments.

> I had the hardest class there and the principal didn't appreciate what we did with them. I thought that was pretty sad for her not to acknowledge that these kids who bite and pinch and scratch and do weird things, are learning how to function. Learning how to be a little better. . . She's the one who told me, "You're not supposed to be teaching them how to read and write."

In another district, almost one third of the teachers surveyed did not feel that they could count on their principal to provide appropriate assistance when a student's behavior required it. One quarter indicated that their principal did not actively assist in teachers effort to integrate students.

One veteran teacher described her school as a "total leadership vacuum." She expressed considerable dissatisfaction with the level of responsibility taken by her principal to assist in managing student behavior problems, stating that "if we didn't do something on our own, it never got done."

Beyond providing technical assistance and feedback, some teachers talked about the degree to which principals communicated respect and created an environment in which teachers felt valued. Some talked about the extent to which their principals actively included them in the life of the school. One itinerant special educator recalled her experience:

> The principal was very reluctant to give me anything and seemed to be reluctant to treat me as a staff member. Her teachers were allotted certain materials and I was not. Usually it ended up that the secretary would say, "Here, have a stapler." or "Here's a pen." Practically the first thing out of her mouth was: "Well, whose budget are you on?"

> I guess she epitomized the whole thing when, on the very last day of school, she mispronounced my name. That kind of epitomized the whole year!

Nearly a third of the special education teaching staff in one district reported that they do not feel included in what goes on in their school.

Further, general educators were more likely than special educators to agree to the following statements: My principal a) provides current information about teaching/learning; b) informs me about school/district policies; c) explains reasons behind programs and practices; d) understands my program and what I do; e) provides leadership about what we are trying to achieve; and f) interacts with me frequently.

It is important to note, however, that many teachers also reported positive and supportive relationships with their building principals. For example, active participation in decision making, promoted by the principal, had a significant, positive effect on this teacher's work experience.

> [When developing a school improvement plan], most of the principals knock off a few lines on their own and send it in and say "this is what we're working on," and then they tell the whole faculty.
>
> Well, [our site administrator] has meetings with all of us, and asks *us* what we want to work on, what we think we'd like to see happening in the school. And once we outlined the objectives and so forth, she would give us the resources to do it. It just was such a feeling of being able to accomplish things! I had never felt that before. I'd never felt the power to really be able to make changes and accomplish things.

She further described how her principal went to considerable lengths to obtain needed resources for teachers — a form of *back-up* that contributed significantly to her satisfaction.

> Whatever little bits of money she could find in the budget, anywhere, she'd hunt it down for us. She'd get it there for us in some way or other. And if she couldn't, she'd say so, and then maybe we'd have to go into some other kind of strategy . But if it was there, she'd let us have it and she'd let us do what we felt we needed to do with it.

Some teachers discussed the power held by their principals to determine the shape of the school's special education programs. In one case, a principal's active leadership style contributed to the innovation and implementation of a successful co-teaching model, allowing special services to be delivered to students in their general education classrooms. The opportunity to discuss work, in an open and collaborative environment, contributed to a unprecedented growth period in this teacher's career.

> I had a period of growth at this school with my current principal that I just will treasure forever because of the way my principal administrates the school. She tells us what her philosophies are and what methods of teaching she thinks are best. She gives us copies of different research and things to let us know where she is. But she doesn't push to

> change. She sends out little fish hooks, and if we bite, she reels us in and sends us all the places we need to go to grow in those particular areas.
>
> She was concerned about the curriculum, she was concerned about educating the kids. She didn't care whether my chalk ledger was dirty or not or whether I had bulletin boards changed every couple of weeks.
>
> When she came in to observe, rather than saying, "Well, I'd like to see you do this," or "I'd like to see you do that," she'd ask us *why* we would do the things that we would do! And then we'd actually have discussions about that! I'd find myself re-thinking what I had done and why I had done it and if it was the right thing to do.

Given that, in the not too distant past, building administrators often had little or no direct responsibility for special education teachers, students, or programs, the good news is that between 40% and 60% of teachers remaining in the field report positive and supportive relationships with their building principals. The need for continued effort in this area, however, is supported by the fact that sizable numbers of teachers, in all districts, still report concerns.

An appreciable proportion of special education teachers still feel isolated, and attempts to collaborate with other teachers in the school are likely to be extremely difficult. These findings also indicate that school buildings vary greatly in the extent to which they support inclusive special education.

Directions for Addressing Problems with Administrative Support: Bridging the Understanding Gap

While there are no exact formulas for improving administrator-teacher relations, we feel that there are at least two important areas to consider. Each are briefly stated below and covered in more detail in district strategic action planning reports.

- Expand opportunities for meaningful and relevant information exchange between administrators and teachers. Administrator-teacher relations would benefit from increased communication regarding values, priorities, district policy and rationale. Teachers' concerns express an urgent need for districts to expand opportunities for meaningful exchange of ideas and relevant information *particularly it relates to special education policy and the realities of teachers' day to day work.*

- Expand opportunities for professional development and learning. Many teachers spoke at length about their innovations in teaching and/or program design. Often these achievements, as perceived by the teacher, were based on long-term, self-initiated efforts. With frequency, teachers reported dissatisfaction with the amount of recognition they received for such work, often making statements to the effect that "nobody even noticed." In one district close to half of the teachers were dissatisfied with the opportunities for professional learning and growth available to them. Teachers often saw arrangement of these possibilities as the responsibility of the central office.

Working Paper

Attrition of Special Educators: Why They Leave and Where They Go

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Objectives

The objectives of our research were to identify the reasons why special educators leave the special education classroom and determine the occupations they subsequently enter. Information about what teachers do after they leave special education classrooms helps to understand better the effect of teacher attrition on individual schools and school systems. To accomplish these objectives, we conducted individual phone interviews with 103 former special education teachers. The former teachers were part of a larger study of 1,576 special education teachers who completed a survey in March, 1993.

Methodology

Sample

Participants in the phone interviews were 103 randomly selected Florida teachers who did not return to their special education teaching position after the 1992-1993 school year. Because a random sample of special education leavers were drawn, all types of service delivery models (e.g., resource room, self-contained), and various demographic profiles (e.g., race, age, sex) were represented. We did not include teachers in the areas of gifted and speech for two reasons. First, these teachers may experience their own set of unique problems. Second, the federal government does not recognize these certification areas as special education. All other certification areas (e.g., learning disabilities, serious emotional disturbance [SED]) were included. Teachers sampled were employed full-time and teaching on either an emergency or permanent certification. We included emergency certified teachers because of higher attrition rates among this group. Of the 1,576 teachers identified, we excluded 69 potential participants from the sample because they were either not teaching special education or no longer in their position. Of the remaining 1,507 identified respondents, 1208 returned their surveys for an overall response rate of 80.2%.

Using the Florida Department of Education's state data base, we determined that 171 of the teachers who participated in our survey were "leavers" in the 1993-1994 school year. We categorized teachers as leavers if they were not teaching full-time in special education classrooms in the public school system. For example, leavers included those who switched to general education, those who moved to specialist or administrative positions, or those who left the teaching field altogether (see Table 1). We selected a random sample of 103 leavers to interview.

Procedures

We sent each of the selected leavers a letter explaining our research, a list of the interview questions, and a postcard to return to us with their correct address, phone number, and convenient contact times. We then attempted to contact the leavers to conduct the phone interview. Each of our three interviewers engaged in a one-hour training session on conducting telephone interviews and using the interview protocol. Experts in qualitative research conducted the training sessions where interviewers were given instructions for probing and cautioned about leading or suggesting during the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 5-10 minutes, and was audio-taped and transcribed. Three of the respondents chose to send in written replies to the questions. Our analysis of the written responses revealed that their answers were not notably different from those obtained through the telephone interviews.

The interview protocol consisted of the following questions: (1) What is your current employment situation? (2) What were your primary and secondary reasons for leaving special education? (3) Was there anything the school system could have done to make you remain in the special education classroom? (4) What incentives would cause you to consider returning to teaching in a special education classroom? (5) What are your future career plans? (6) If you could do it all over again, would you become a special education teacher? These questions were developed by the researchers, based on previous attrition research conducted by Billingsley, Bodkins, and Hendricks (1993).

Response Rate

Out of the 103 leavers that we attempted to contact, 96 agreed to participate in our study. Thus, our final response rate was 93%.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the interviews using qualitative and quantitative analyses. For the qualitative analysis, we transcribed interviews verbatim and then coded units of data. After coding the data, we compared similarly coded data to determine which aspects of reasons stated were always present (see Pfaffenberger, 1988; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Similarly coded data formed categories of responses that we compared to concepts identified in the teacher attrition literature.

We also quantified teacher responses to interview questions. For the first question, we developed a list of 16 broad occupational areas based on the responses given by the participants (see Table 1). We then calculated percentages of teachers in each occupational area. Second, we coded leavers as disgruntled, nondisgruntled, or unable to discern based on their answers to interview questions. We then determined the numbers of teachers represented by each code.

Results

When asked about their current employment status, leavers noted education and noneducation related positions (see Table 1). The majority of leavers indicated that the left and took positions that were education related. The education related positions included, for example, teaching general education, other non administrative positions, administration, district level specialist (e.g., behavior specialist), and substitute teaching. Of the education-related positions, the largest percentage of former special education teachers left to teach general education.

Special educators who left the classroom for non-educational positions made up the second largest category of leavers. We were able to account for the remaining leavers by indicating their positions as either unknown, retired from the system, were on maternity leave, were deceased, or moved out of the country.

Leavers were also asked to describe their primary reasons for leaving the special education classroom. We used these primary reasons and other responses on the interview to categorize teachers as disgruntled, nondisgruntled, and unable to discern. Disgruntled teachers made up the largest category of leavers (n=49). Nondisgruntled teachers made up the second largest category of teachers (n=36). We were unable to determine whether the remaining 11 leavers were disgruntled or nondisgruntled.

Disgruntled Leavers

After placing leavers in the three broad categories, we conducted additional coding to identify broad factors related to leaving. Disgruntled teachers left the classroom primarily because they felt overwhelmed, unsupported, unprepared, and/or disempowered. Interestingly, many of the teachers did not leave because of one factor. Instead, the interaction of factors often resulted in a teacher's decision to leave. For instance, Susan said that she quit teaching after 15 years because she had to manage dangerous students in undesirable work conditions. She said,

> It was very clear that the kids were not wanted there. They had the worst of everything. The kids lacked security. They did not even have a permanent classroom, and they had to move from room to room. They knew they were not wanted. And there was a lack of administrative support. I felt unsafe. I had no buzzer or phone. Some of my kids were very dangerous.

Other teachers stated that high, diverse student caseloads and no paraprofessionals to assist in the classroom lead to frustration. After teaching special education, one out-of-field teacher, Sarah, said that she had too many students and no aide. She spent her last year in special education working with 36 students. In addition, she said that the school was moving towards a multicategorical model and that many of her students were not solely learning disabled. The multiple disabilities were just too much for this teacher to deal with in one room.

In addition to behavior problems and high, diverse student caseloads, teachers felt that they did not have resources and support to assist them. When Karen was asked why she left after 3 years, she said,

> My classload was 20 with no help, with no administrative back-up and every time I would ask for some help I was told I was the one with the special education degree. I had to keep them in the class [because] they did not want them sent to the dean. I got no support. I was told I had to use the county adopted books, but I was never given any resources. And the books they chose were far beyond my kids capabilities. I worked in a [multicategorical] classroom [with students with emotional handicaps and learning disabilities] and before I left they were sticking in [students with educable mental handicaps].

More decision-making power and reduced class size would be incentive for Karen to return. She said that if teachers really had the ability to make decisions about what was best for students and class size was restricted, she would return to the special education classroom.

Some teachers also felt unprepared to cope with the demands presented by special education students, particularly the behavior problems of students with SED. Lenora, an out-of-field teacher, claimed that her first year in special education teaching students with SED was extremely difficult. She said, "You have all these outbursts you don't know quite how to deal with, because in the elementary program you don't have any kind of training or any kind of knowledge of special education." In addition to being unprepared, she lacked appropriate materials for assisting the student. She stated that her students were often operating on a 4th or 5th grade achievement level but that they had seventh grade reading or math books to use.

Another out-of-field teacher, Jackie left because of frustration with all the paperwork and legalities in special education. She said that she liked teaching the students but that the amount of paperwork was unrealistic. When asked if she would become a special educator again, she said, "No, because of the "excruciating" paperwork, the necessity of redoing the paperwork for small errors, [and] all the read tape. The system is failing the kids, and because of that, I cannot support it."

Sources of dissatisfaction for leavers also interacted with outside influences (i.e., raising a family, retirement) in thirteen special education teachers' decisions to leave. For instance, Shawna, after teaching three years, stated that having a baby gave her an excuse to get out of a teaching situation where she received little support from the administration.

When we asked disgruntled leavers if they would become a special education teacher again, 23 teachers said that they would. They felt that they benefited from their experience in special education and enjoyed the children. Unfortunately, other aspects of teaching special education drove them out of the classroom.

Nondisgruntled Leavers

Nondisgruntled leavers specifically indicated that they enjoyed teaching special education. These leavers usually left the special education classroom because of external factors, such as other job opportunities, certification requirements, family influences, retirement, position not reoffered, and inadequate pay. The two largest groups of nondisgruntled leavers left the special education classroom because they were able to obtain a more interesting job in their school district or because they were uncertified. For instance, Mary left after her first year of teaching because a transition consultant position opened in her school and this was her main area of interest. Uncertified teachers claimed that they liked special education but that they either could not remain in their position or were frustrated by certification requirements and decided to return to general education. Louise went back to general education after teaching special education for one year because she could not afford the cost of taken additional certification classes. When asked why she did return to special education, Louise said,

> I did not have certification in it. In order to teach it again, which I [wanted to do], I would have had to ... take more classes. . . . I have a daughter that started college this year and there is just no way I could have afforded to take anymore classes.

Unlike disgruntled leavers, nondisgruntled leavers did not complain about working conditions with the exception of one teacher complaining about restrictions and paperwork imposed by special education legislation and a second teacher noting lack of support from general education administrators and teachers. In addition, nondisgruntled leavers were more likely than disgruntled leavers to transfer into educational positions within the public school system. Nondisgruntled leavers were also less likely to be teaching students with SED in either a resource, self-contained, or day school setting. Fifty percent of nondisgruntled leavers taught SED as opposed to 71 percent of disgruntled leavers.

Unable to Discern

Leavers in this category left because of certification requirements, positions not reoffered, and death. For teachers in the unable to discern category, we were unable to tell from their responses if they were disgruntled or nondisgruntled. The uncertified teachers, however, did express frustrations with certification requirements or note that life events made it impossible for them to consider fulfilling additional certification requirements.

Incentives to Return

When we asked leavers what could be done to encourage them to return to their last position or special education teaching, their responses varied widely. The largest portion of leavers said that no incentives could be provided to encourage them to return to the special education classroom. Many leavers also mentioned that more administrative and instructional support was necessary for them to return to the classroom. In addition, 17 leavers stated that increased salary would encourage them to return. In fact, several leavers stated that the salaries earned in special education were not sufficient to compensate for the stress associated with teaching students with disabilities. A smaller group of leavers suggested a reduced workload would be necessary to encourage them to return. Finally, 5 leavers suggested that flexibility in certification requirements would encourage them to return.

Future Career Plans

We also asked leavers about their future career plans. Fifty-four of the leavers indicated that they wish to remain in education in some capacity but not in the special education classroom. Of these teachers, 21 want to teach in general education classrooms and 16 want to be administrators at the building or district level. Ten leavers indicated that they would like to return to the special education classroom. However, 4 of these teachers indicated that they would only return if conditions were different. Three leavers stated that they would return only as a teacher of preschoolers with disabilities or if they could team teach.

Of the remaining leavers, 13 were uncertain of their career plans with 2 teachers indicating that they may return to special education. Twelve will seek employment or currently are employed outside of education. Finally, one teacher intends to be a mother, another wants to retire, and the remaining teacher would like to work in the public sector establishing programs for school children.

Discussion

The decision to leave the special education classroom is often complex and the result of many factors, particularly when teachers leave because they are disgruntled. In our study, disgruntled leavers frequently gave two and three primary reasons for leaving the special education classroom; whereas, nondisgruntled leavers usually gave one reason for leaving the special education classroom. In fact, disgruntled leavers sometimes commented that there were several primary factors in their decision to leave.

Working conditions often precipitated a disgruntled leaver's decision to leave the special education classroom. These teachers felt overwhelmed by class size, student behavior, insufficient administrative support, a lack of personnel and material resources, and a host of other factors that are beyond remuneration. Because the majority of leavers were disgruntled and indicated that certain incentives would cause them to consider returning to the classroom, careful attention should be paid to the working conditions of classrooms and schools in which teachers operate. Standardized retention strategies, however, will most likely be ineffective given the highly individual nature of a teacher's decision to leave the classroom. Thus, the top-down implementation of policy and interventions that typically occur in education will be ineffective. District and school personnel will need to work collaboratively to develop retention strategies for individual districts and schools. This type of collaboration will be necessary for meeting the individual needs of teachers.

Additionally, the hiring of out-of-field teachers should be reconsidered. Our results indicate that certain general education teachers are well suited for special education but are frequently discouraged by extensive certification requirements. Possibly, uncertified teachers who are committed to teaching special education and capable of effectively instructing students with disabilities could have flexibility in meeting state certification requirements. Quality distance education programs and alternative certification offered by school districts may be a more effective avenue for meeting uncertified special education teachers' needs and is worth further study. State policymakers may also want to consider providing funds to supplement the costs of uncertified teachers obtaining certification in special education. Not all out-of-field teachers, however, should be considered for special education positions. Our results show that 28% of the disgruntled leavers were teaching out-of-field. Thus, administrators must consider carefully the personality and abilities of the general education teacher being hired. If personnel needs in special education must continually be met by hiring out-of-field teachers, then attempts must be made to hire persons who are well suited for teaching special education. Administrators, however, will have difficulty recruiting talented general education teachers for special education unless the position of classroom teacher is made more attractive.

School and district administrators must also carefully attend to the needs of teachers educating students with SED. We found that teachers of students with SED, irrespective of educational setting (i.e., multicategorical resource room, self-contained classroom, or day school) were more likely to voice concerns about workplace conditions and indicate that incentives could not be used to keep them in special education classroom or entice them to return. Apparently, teachers of students with SED need more support and resources to deal with the demands of their jobs. Building principals need to be sensitized to the challenges of educating students with emotional handicaps. Educational leadership programs should provide specific learning experiences that assist building administrators in acquiring the skills necessary for managing student behavior.

Further, recent advances in technology could be used to provide the extra support to all special education teachers. Computer networks have the potential to provide a powerful avenue for collaboration and learning and may serve to reduce the isolation of special education teachers. In addition, teacher educators and school district personnel can use a fiber optic network to provide on-line support to teachers in the classroom. A fiber optic network allows teachers to communicate directly with other persons while they are teaching. Such a technological tool could be used to provide teachers with the feedback that they need to learn more effective instructional and behavioral strategies and may help reduce these teachers' feelings of isolation.

Finally, we found that not all teacher attrition in special education is negative. A substantial portion of the leavers we interviewed intend to remain in education. Consequently, the time, energy, and resources spent educating special education teachers is ultimately returned to the educational system. More problematic, however, is the impact that teacher attrition may have on students with disabilities. If qualified teachers leave the special education classroom, then the education of students with disabilities may be diminished. To date, the relationship between teacher quality and attrition has not been established and is an area worthy of further investigation.

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Table 1

Where Teachers Go When They Leave The Special Education Classroom

Where they go	Number	Percentage[a]
Education Related		
Teaching general education	23	22.3%
Other education position in public school (not administration)	16	15.5%
Administration	6	5.8%
District level specialist	6	5.8%
Substitute teaching	5	4.9%
Teaching special education in private or adult school	5	4.9%
School-level specialist	4	3.9%
Working on graduate degree in special education	2	1.9%
Teaching in special education department in University	1	1.0%
Noneducation Related		
Exit to non-educational field	14	13.6%
Unknown	7	6.8%
Retired	5	4.9%
Maternity - probably will not return	4	3.9%
Deceased	2	1.9%
Maternity - probably will return	2	1.9%
Moved out of the country	1	1.0%
Total	103	100%

[a]Note: Percentages have been rounded to the nearest decimal point.

Working Paper

Retention and Attrition in Special Education: Analysis of Variables that Predict Staying, Transferring, or Leaving

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Introduction

Teacher attrition in special education is considered a significant problem by many education professionals (NASDE, 1990; Billingsley, 1993; Brownell & Smith, 1992). Until recently, only a few large scale studies existed that examined factors associated with special education teacher attrition. Many of these studies did not compare stayers and leavers and leavers were poorly defined. Consequently, our understanding of the factors associated with leaving the special education classroom is limited and our ability to remediate attrition problems is subsequently limited. Thus, the objective of this study was to determine the personal and workplace variables which predict a special educator's decision to stay, transfer, or leave the classroom.

Methodology

Sample

Using the Florida State data base system, a stratified random sample of 1,576 special education teachers were selected for the study. The stratification variables were years of experience in their current teaching position. Special education teachers were randomly selected across elementary and secondary schools to include 524 first year teachers, 528 teachers with two to five years experience, and 518 teachers with more than five years experience (i.e., career teachers).

Because a random sample of special educators was drawn, teachers across all certification areas (e.g., learning disabilities, serious emotional disturbance), types of service delivery models (e.g., resource room, self-contained), and various demographic profiles (e.g., race, age, sex) were represented. Teachers sampled were employed full-time and teaching on either a emergency or permanent certification. Emergency certified teachers were included because of higher attrition rates among this group.

Instrument

Our survey instrument, *Working in Schools: The Life of a Special Educator* was designed to address many of the variables contained in our conceptual framework. Examples of these variables are as follows: (a) historical factors such as initial commitment to teaching, educational preparation (b) microsystem factors such as relationships with students, reasonableness of work load, personal teaching efficacy, (c) mesosystem factors such as relationships with colleagues, support from building administrators, role conflict, (d) exosystem factors such as salary, service delivery system, job benefits, and (e) external personal factors such as income of family, number of dependents. Measures of job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and intent to remain in special education teaching were also included. Previously validated questions were used in constructing this survey instrument when deemed appropriate. Sample questions are included in Table 1b.

The survey instrument was field tested twice with 51 special educators in Florida. In addition to responding to the survey and providing written feedback, 9 field test participants were selected for follow-up interviews to assess their interpretation of individual items and solicit their feedback on the instrument.

After field-testing the instrument, the large-scale mail out was conducted. Survey packets were sent to each of the 1,576 identified participants. Two follow-up letters and telephone calls were used to increase the response rate.

Response Rate

Response rates for the two groups of teachers were calculated using Dillman's formula (1978). Dillman's formula accounts for those persons who the survey researcher was unable to reach or use because of mistakes in the state data base in terms of job code (e.g., teachers identified as a special educators who were in reality staffing specialists).

Response Rate = [# surveys returned / (sample size - # excluded respondents)] x 100

Of the 1,576 teachers identified, we excluded 69 potential participants from the study because we were either unable to contact those teachers by mail. Of the remaining 1,507 identified respondents, 1,208 returned their surveys for an overall response rate of 80.2%. Because some respondents were inappropriately coded as special education teachers in the state data base, an additional 56 surveys were removed from the data base.

Data Analysis

The main purpose of the analyses was to determine the historical, microsystem, and mesosystem variables which predict a special educator's decision to stay, transfer, or leave the classroom. The variables were selected based on variables included in the three urban attrition projects and the literature. Table 1a contains a list of the predictors used in the analyses. With the exception of current certification, years teaching, gender, race, and age, the independent variables represent teachers perceptions on likert scales. The outcome measures were the teachers' professional status two years after the survey data were collected. At the time of the survey, all teachers were teaching in special education classrooms. A total of 1,152 teachers were included in the data base. As shown in Table 1a, the average teacher was female (86%), white (87%), 36 years old, and had 11.5 years of teaching experience.

Two models were estimated with forward stepwise logistic regression methods. The first model was used to differentiate leavers (those no longer teaching in special education) from stayers and transfers. The second model was used to differentiate stayers (teaching in the same school) from transfers (still teaching in special education but in a different school).

Results

The first logistic regression model had 738 stayers/transfers and 197 leavers with complete data. The stepwise logistic regression entered two predictors with significant effects. Both current certification status (p=.0002) and stress (p=.0003) were significant. After controlling for stress and certification, no other variables were significant. In Table 2, the probability of being a leaver is shown for teachers who were appropriately certified and not appropriately certified and by stress level. The stress levels represent teachers at the mean (15.59) and at 1 or 2 standard deviations from the mean. For example, at the mean for stress, an inappropriately certified teacher has a 31% chance of becoming a leaver while a appropriately certified teacher has a 18% chance of becoming a leaver. As shown, an inappropriately certified teacher with high stress has the highest probability of leaving (.43) while an appropriately certified teacher with little stress has the lowest probability of leaving (.11).

Those variables that have greater than a .30 correlation with stress are satisfaction with student relations (r=-.37), satisfaction with workload (r=-.46), interaction with colleagues (r=-.30), autonomy (r=-.35), role conflict (r=.40), satisfaction with professional opportunities (r=-.34), satisfaction with benefits (r=-.39), and school climate (r=-.38).

The second logistic regression model had 189 transfers and 549 stayers with complete data. The stepwise logistic regression entered two predictors with significant effects. Both climate (p=.0001) and age (p=.0008) were significant. After controlling for climate and age, no other variables were significant. In Table 3, the probability of being a transfer is shown for teachers at age 25, 35, and 45 (about the mean and 1 SD from the mean) and by climate level. Climate levels represent teachers at the mean (8.97) and at 1 or 2 standard deviations from the mean. As shown in Table 3, the probability of transferring increases with decreases in age or climate. For example, a 25 year old teacher in a poor climate has the highest probability of transferring (.50) while a 45 year old teacher in a good climate has the lowest probability of transferring (.13).

Those variables that have greater than a .30 correlation with school climate are satisfaction with workload (r=.32), frequency of recognition (r=.31), interaction with colleagues (r=.41), support from community and parents (r=.30), support from building administrator (r=.53), autonomy (r=.39), role conflict (r=.40), satisfaction with professional opportunities (r=.41), satisfaction with benefits (r=.39), and stress (r=-.38).

Discussion

Our results question the practice of placing uncertified teachers in special education classrooms, particularly classroom situations where teachers are likely to experience high levels of stress. Many vacancies in special education, particularly those in serious emotional disturbance, are filled by general education teachers. General education teachers are unlikely to have the skills to educate students with disabilities, especially those with serious behavior problems.

Stress experienced by special education teachers, however, cannot be lowered simply by improving workplace conditions. Correlations calculated in this study for stress and various workplace variables indicate that stress is an independent construct. It may be the case that stress is mediated by a person's ability to cope and leavers may be persons with less effective coping strategies. Clearly, more research is needed in this area.

At the district and school level, attrition can be reduced through attempts to improve school climate. The variables contributing to a positive school climate, however, need to be more clearly delineated. Although we identified several variables that contributed significantly to school climate, such as building administrator support, it is also an independent construct.

Table 1a

Independent Variables Used in Stepwise Logistic Regression Analyses

Variable	Mean	SD
Current Certification (1=Appropriate, 0=Not)	.83	.37
Caseload--students taught directly	24.17	19.67
Satisfaction with Teaching Load	36.96	8.11
Satisfaction with Relationship with Students	15.71	2.98
Personal Teacher Efficacy	18.47	2.25
Perceived Support from Parents/Community	15.36	3.52
Perceived Support of Building Administrator	32.45	7.59
Perceived Support of District Administrator	29.04	9.51
Perceived Frequency of Recognition	20.56	4.29
Perceived Importance of Recognition	25.22	4.76
Perceived Autonomy	21.65	4.45
School Climate	8.97	2.54
Perceived Role Conflict	9.92	2.57
Professional Satisfaction	15.33	3.34
Perception of Adequate Preparation for Job	24.67	4.41
Satisfaction with Benefits	20.73	3.81
Perceived Stress	15.59	5.34
Commitment to Teaching and Special Education	32.81	6.23
Satisfaction with Special Education Teaching	2.26	1.08
Interaction with Colleagues	20.91	5.06
Years of Teaching Experience	11.51	9.16
Gender (1=Male, 0=Female)	.14	.35
Race (1=White, 0=Other)	.87	.33
Age	36.21	9.85

Table 1b

Examples of Sample Questions and Coding of Variables Used in Analyses

Variable	Sample Question	Coding
Caseload--students taught directly	How many students on your caseload do you teach directly?	1 item - blank box for respondent input
Satisfaction with teaching load (Range 14-56)	I am teaching with adequate resources and materials to do my job properly	Sum of 14 items on 4-point Likert scale where 4=agree; 1=disagree
Satisfaction with relationship with students (Range 6-24)	How satisfied are you with your students' motivation to learn?	Sum of 6 items on 4 point Likert scale where 4=satisfied; 1=dissatisfied
Personal teaching efficacy (Range 5-20)	If I really try hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students	Sum of 5 items on 4 point Likert scale where 4=agree; 1=disagree
Perceived support from parents/community (Range 5-20)	Most of my student's parents respect and support the things I do	Sum of 5 items on 4 point Likert scale where 4=agree; 1=disagree
Perceived support from building administrator (Range 10-40)	My building administrator supports my actions and needs	Sum of 10 items on 4 point Likert scale where 4=agree; 1=disagree
Perceived support from district administration (Range 10-40)	My district administrator supports my actions and needs	Sum of 10 items on 4 point Likert scale where 4=agree; 1=disagree
Perceived frequency of recognition (Range 8-32)	How often do you receive formal or informal recognition from special education colleagues?	Sum of 8 items on 4 point Likert scale where 4=often; 1=never or almost never
Perceived autonomy (Range 8-32)	I am satisfied with the current level of decision-making power I have in my current position	Sum of 8 items on 4 point Likert scale where 4=agree; 1=disagree
Perceived role-conflict (Range 7-28)	In your job, how often do you experience conflict between trying to match your students' academic needs versus attending to their social and behavioral needs?	Sum of 7 items on 4 point Likert scale where 4=often; 1=never or almost never

Variable	Sample Question	Coding
Professional satisfaction (Range 7-28)	How satisfied are you with the intellectual challenge in your job?	Sum of 7 items on 4 point Likert scale where 4=satisfied;1=dissatisfied
Perceptions of adequate preparation for various aspects of the job (Range 8-32)	How well prepared do you feel you are in behavior management?	Sum of 8 items on 4 point Likert scale where 4=well prepared;1=not at all prepared
Satisfaction with benefits (Range 8-32)	How satisfied are you with your salary?	Sum of 8 items on 4 point Likert scale where 4=satisfied;1=dissatisfied
Perceived stress (Range 6-30)	I worry about school problems while at home	Sum of 6 items on 5 point Likert scale where 5=almost always;1=almost never
Commitment to teaching, and to special education (Range 13-52)	I would become a teacher if I had it to do over again I would transfer to another field if I had the opportunity	Sum of 13 items on 4 point Likert scale where 4=agree;1=disagree
Satisfaction with teaching special education (Range 1-4)	Overall, how satisfied are you with teaching special education?	1 item on 4 point Likert scale where 1=very satisfied;4=very dissatisfied

Table 2

Probability of Leaving Special Education

	Certification	
Stress	*Inappropriate*	*Appropriate*
4.91	.21	.11
10.25	.25	.14
15.59	.31	.18
20.93	.37	.22
26.27	.43	.27

Table 3

Probability of Transferring to Another School

	Age		
Climate	*25*	*35*	*45*
3.89	.50	.42	.35
6.43	.42	.35	.28
8.97	.34	.28	.22
11.51	.27	.21	.17
14.05	.21	.16	.13

RETENTION, TRANSFER, AND ATTRITION OF SPECIAL AND GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE[1]

Paper Presented at the

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Special Education Teacher Satisfaction, Retention and Attrition

Washington DC

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Introduction

There has long been significant concern about securing and retaining a fully-qualified teaching force in special education. The concern has been fueled by reports of factors that create a sizable annual demand for new hires of special education teachers (SETs) to fill open positions, and reports of significantly less retention of SETs than of general education teachers (GETs). Factors commonly cited as responsible for a high annual demand for SETs are:

- A relatively high annual rate of attrition of SETs compared with GETs,
- A relatively high annual rate of transfer of SETs to general education compared with the transfer of GETs to special eduction,
- The relatively rapid expansion of teaching positions in special education compared with general education, and
- A shortage of fully-qualified SETs to fill open positions, which results in the hiring of many individuals of lesser qualifications--thereby leaving a continuing demand for fully-qualified teachers.

Until recently, it has been difficult to quantify the extent to which these factors contribute to the high annual demand for new hires in the field of special education nationwide because detailed national data have not been available. That has changed in recent years as information has become available from two surveys of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES): the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), and its companion Teacher Followup Survey (TFS). The purpose of this report, therefore, is to use these new data sources to analyze, from a national perspective, the specific components of retention, transfer, and attrition of SETs in comparison with GETs. Better information should assist policy makers and administrators in designing more effective intervention strategies targeting teacher demand and shortage problems.

Method

Data Sources

The research reported here is based on two national data bases (SASS for 1990-91 and TFS for 1992) that include information on public school teachers and public schools. These data bases were derived from national probability samples. Therefore, SASS provides nationally representative estimates of the numbers and attributes of teachers in 1990-91, while TFS, a longitudinal component of SASS, likewise provides nationally representative estimates about position changes made by teachers from the 1990-91 school year to the next year. Using these data bases, it is possible to identify, from one year to the next, changes in teacher employment status in considerable detail. Additional information about SASS and TFS is provided in Appendix A.

The Teacher Sample

In keeping with the SASS definition, a teacher was any full-time or part-time teacher whose main assignment was teaching in any of grades K-12, including itinerant teachers and long-term substitutes. Excluded from this definition were short-term substitute teachers, student teachers, non-teaching specialists (e.g., counselor, librarian, school social worker, occupational therapist, and the like), administrators, teacher aides, and other professional or support staff.

All teachers were classified into two main teaching fields: special education and general education. SETs were defined as public school teachers (K-12) who indicated that their current main teaching assignment was in any one of a variety of teaching specializations within special education, while GETs were defined as all public school teachers (K-12) other than SETs. The sizes of the samples of SETs and GETs on which the analyses of this report were based are presented in Tables 1 through 4 of Appendix B. Additional information about the definition of teachers and the selection of the teacher sample is provided in Appendix A.

Design

The research was designed to analyze, from a national perspective, various retention, transfer, attrition, and supply components of the public education teaching force during 1990-91 and 1991-92 as a function of main teaching field (viz. special education and general education). The specific components of the teaching force analyzed are described below.

Teaching Field Retention. Teaching field retention refers to SETs and GETs in 1990-91 who continued in their respective main teaching fields during 1991-92.

Teaching Field Transfer (Switchers). Teaching field transfer refers to SETs who transferred from 1990-91 to 1991-92 to general education as their main teaching field, and GETs who similarly transferred to special education.

Attrition. SETs and GETs who were public school teachers in 1990-91, but who did not continue as public school teachers in 1991-92, constituted the attrition component. Included in the attrition component were public school teachers (K through 12) in 1990-91 who left to teach pre-kindergarten or to teach in a private school in 1991-92.[1]

School Retention. School retention refers to SETs and GETs in 1990-91 who both (a) continued in their respective main teaching fields in 1991-92, and (b) remained in their same school in 1991-92.

School Reassignment. School reassignment refers to SETs and GETs in 1990-91 who (a) continued in their respective main teaching fields in 1991-92, but (b) where reassigned (either voluntarily or involuntarily) to a different school in their home district in 1991-92.

District Migration. District migration refers to SETs and GETs in 1990-91 who (a) continued in their respective main teaching fields in 1991-92, but (b) migrated to a different district in 1991-92. District migration was subdivided into teachers who (a) migrated to a different school district within the same state, and (b) migrated to a school district in a different state.

District Retention. District retention refers to SETs and GETs in 1990-91 who both (a) continued in their respective main teaching fields in 1991-92, and (b) remained in the same district in 1991-92. This category combines the school retention and school reassignment components defined above.

District Attrition. District attrition refers to SETs and GETs in 1990-91 who (a) continued in their respective main teaching fields in 1991-92, but (b) left their home district in 1991-92. This category combines the district migration and attrition components defined above.

Entering Teachers. Entering teachers were defined as individuals who where not teaching in either public or private schools during 1990-91, and who commenced teaching in a public school during 1991-92. Entering teachers include both reentering experienced teachers and first-time teachers.

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[1] Since this report focuses on public school teachers, teacher transfers from public to private schools are classified as attrition from public schools. If transfers to private schools are not classified as attrition, lower attrition percentages are obtained (e.g., Bobbitt, Leich, Whitener, & Lynch, 1994).

Private School Migrants. Private school migrants were defined as individuals teaching in private schools during 1990-91, and who migrated to teaching positions in public schools during 1991-92.

The district retention and district attrition components of the teaching force were analyzed further according to school location stratified by four levels of the urbanicity variable, as described below[2]:

Urban. Central city of a standardized metropolitan area.

Suburban/Large Town. An urban fringe of a standardized metropolitan area, or towns with a population greater than 24,999 not located inside a standardized metropolitan area.

Small Town. A town with a population from 2,500 to 24,999 not located inside a standardized metropolitan area.

Rural. A place with fewer than 2,500, or a place designated as rural by the U.S. Bureau of Census.

Analysis Procedures

Based on the teacher followup sample sizes reported in Tables 1, 2, and 3, weighted national estimates of the numbers of teachers (as well as associated percentages and standard errors) were computed by procedures used by NCES for complex sample survey data (Kaufman & Huang, 1993). These national estimates are presented in the data tables of this paper and were used for statistical analyses testing for associations among variables. Because SASS and TFS data are subject to design effects due to stratification and clustering of the sample, standard errors were computed using the method of balanced repeated replications. Finally, chi-square tests of the statistical significance of differences between SETs and GETs were performed on the nationally estimated numbers of teachers, and were adjusted appropriately for average weights and for average design effects due to the structure of the sampling procedure.

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[2] See Gruber, Rohr, and Fondelier (1993, p. 147) for technical definitions of the levels of the urbanicity variable.

Results and Discussion[3]

Teaching Field Retention, Transfer, and Attrition

The results presented in Figure 1 provide information about SETs and GETs (a) who are retained in their main teaching field from one year to the next, (b) who transfer to the other teaching field, and (c) who leave public school teaching. As shown, 89% of SETs are retained as SETs from one year to the next. Of the 11% SETs that leave special education annually, 5% transfer to general education (i.e., switch teaching field) while 6% leave public school teaching (i.e., attrition). In contrast, only a very small percentage (0.4%) of GETs transfer to special education and about the same percentage of GETs as SETs (5% vs. 6%) leave the profession. Therefore, the difference between SET and GET retention (as of 1992) is due to the much higher rate of transfer between the two main teaching fields than to the small attrition difference.[4]

In numerical terms, an estimated 15,000 of 288,000 SETs transferred to general education, while an estimated 9,000 of 2,254,000 GETs transferred to special education (data from Table 1, Appendix B). The difference represents a net loss of 6,000 SETs to general education. When combined with the estimated 18,000 SETs who leave the profession each year, the annual net loss of SETs creates a large national demand for replacement teachers.

School Reassignment and Migration

Of the SETs and GETs who were retained in their main teaching field from 1990-91 to 1991-92, detailed information on the mobility of these groups within public education, i.e., school reassignment within home district, and migration to other districts (both in- and out-of-state) is presented in Figure 2. Figure 2 shows that 92% of SETs remain as teachers in the same school from one year to the next, while most of the rest (6%) accept reassignment to a different school in the same district. This represents 98% district retention of SETs retained in their field. Of the remainder, only 2% of SETs migrated to other districts in the same state,

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[3] Figures 1 through 4 are derived from Tables 1 through 4, respectively. The tables, which give more detailed information such as sample sizes and standard errors, are presented in Appendix B.

[4] Special and general education differed significantly in the percentages of teachers in the retention and transfer categories, $\chi^2(2, \underline{N} = 4{,}737) = 69.02, \underline{p} < .001$.

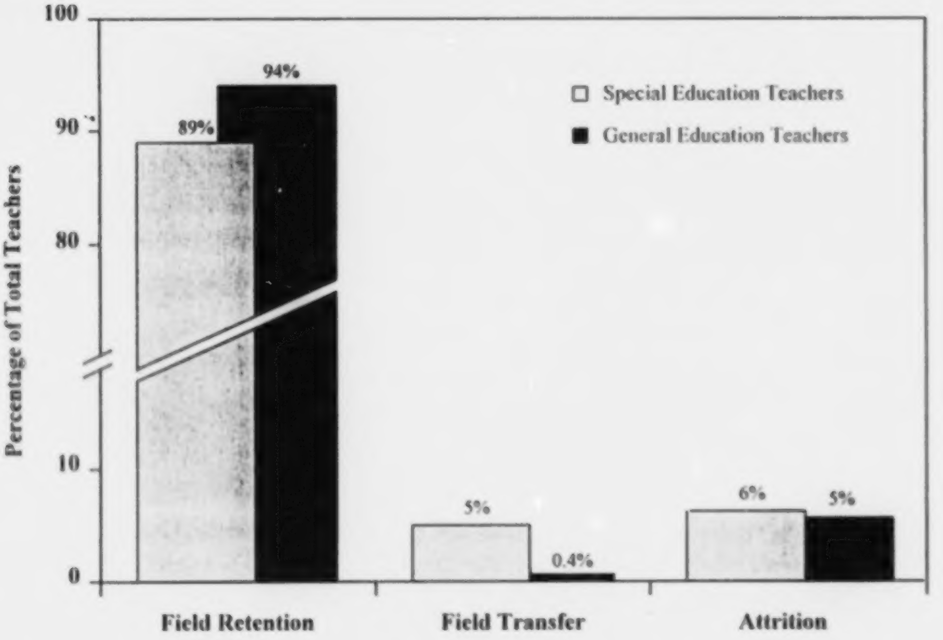

Figure 1. Teaching field retention, transfer, and attrition of public school teachers from 1990-91 to 1991-92 by main teaching field, as percentages of total special education teachers and total general education teachers in 1990-1991. Data Source: The Schools and Staffing Survey (1990-91) and the Teacher Followup Survey (1992) of the National Center for Education Statistics.

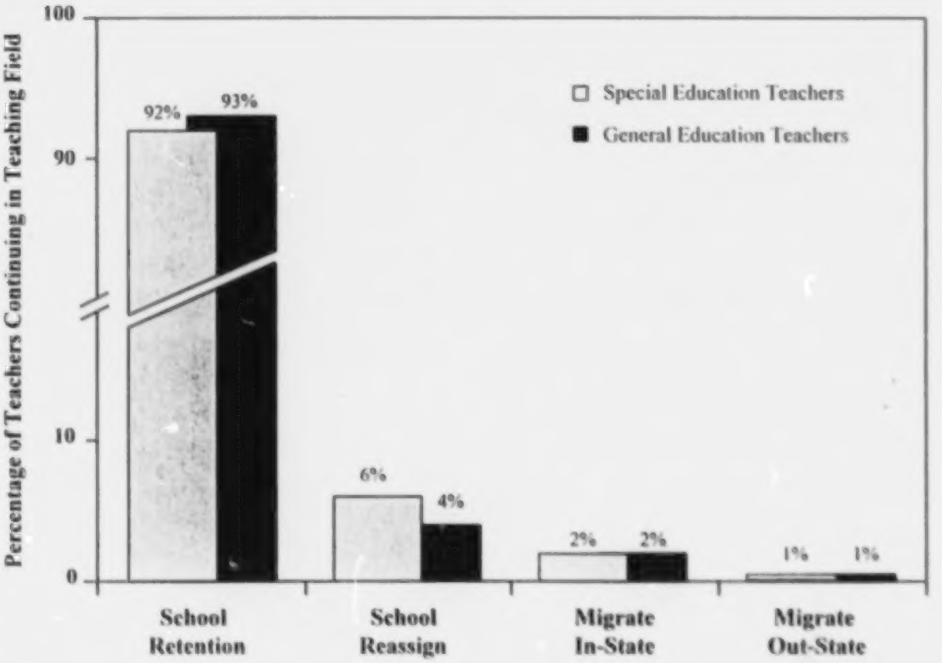

Figure 2. School retention, school reassignment within the same district, and school migration to other in-state and out-of-state districts, of public school teachers from 1990-91 to 1991-92 by main teaching field, as percentages of special education teachers and general education teachers continuing in their main teaching field. Data Source: The Schools and Staffing Survey (1990-91) and the Teacher Followup Survey (1992) of the National Center for Education Statistics.

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while 1% migrated to public schools in a different state. The pattern of school retention, reassignment, and migration of SETs was similar to that of GETs.[5]

It is important to note, however, that from a district perspective, migration to out-of-district schools is a form of attrition and might actually be reported as such by districts, even though it does not represent a loss to the home state or national teaching forces in special education. Similarly, migration out-of-state is typically classified as attrition in state-level studies because state data bases do not ordinarily record the employment status of teachers that leave the state. Therefore, reports of attrition percentages based on state data bases are typically inflated somewhat from the national perspective. One of the advantages of analyses of teacher transfer from national data bases is that cross-district and cross-state transfer of teachers can be differentiated from attrition from the public school teaching force.

District Retention and Urbanicity

Figure 3 presents information about whether retention of teachers within a district is related to the urbanicity of school locations. For purposes of this analysis, district retention refers to teachers in 1990-91 who continued with a main teaching assignment in the same field and in the same district the following year. By contrast, district attrition includes both teachers in 1990-91 who transferred to a different district in 1991-92 (but who continued with a main teaching assignment in the same field) and to teachers who left the profession. Thus, switchers were excluded from this analysis so as to focus on SETs and GETs who continued in their respective teaching fields from one year to the next. The data show that there was no difference in district retention as a function of urbanicity for either SETs or GETs separately, nor was there a difference between district retention for SETs and GETs as a function of urbanicity.[6] While the nature of problems entailed in retaining teachers within a district may depend on a district's location, the magnitude of the district attrition problem does not appear to be greater in urban areas than elsewhere.

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[5] Special and general education did not differ significantly in the percentages of teachers in the various school transfer categories, $\chi^2(3, \underline{N} = 3{,}141) = 6.39$, $\underline{p}<.05$.

[6] District retention percentages were not related significantly to the urbanicity variable for either SETs or GETs [for SETs, $\chi^2(3, \underline{N} = 512) = 2.81$, $\underline{p}>.20$; for GETs, $\chi^2(3, \underline{N} = 3{,}969) = 0.90$, $\underline{p}>.20$]. Likewise, special and general education did not differ significantly in the percentages of teachers retained in their home districts as a function of the urbanicity variable, $\chi^2(3, \underline{N} = 2{,}576) = 4.15$, $\underline{p}<.20$.

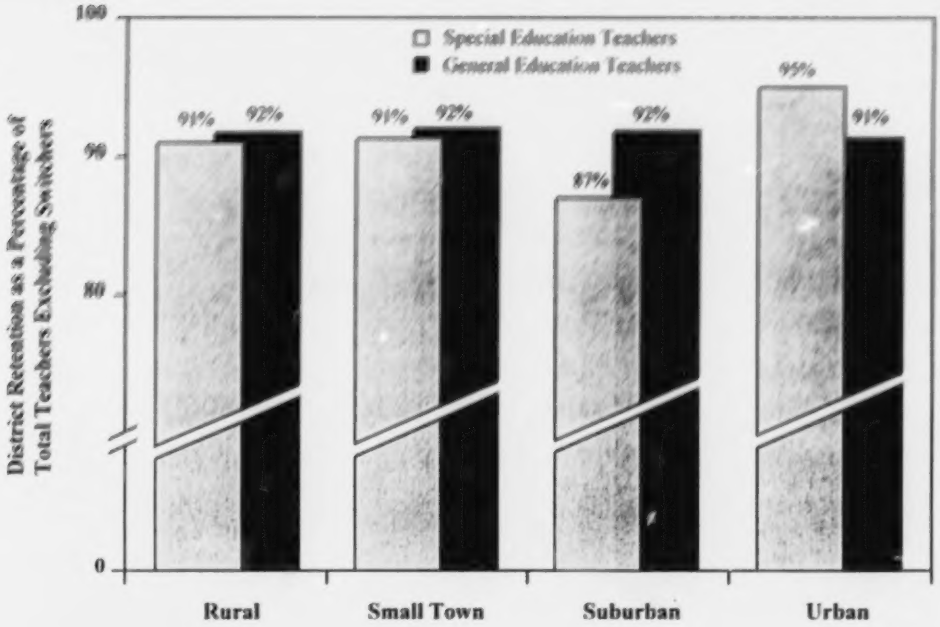

Figure 3. District retention of public school teachers from 1990-91 to 1991-92 by urbanicity of school location (rural, small town, suburban/large town, and urban) and main teaching field, as a percentage of total special education teachers and total general education teachers in 1990-91, excluding teachers who transfer to the other main teaching field (switchers) in 1991-1992. Data Source: The Schools and Staffing Survey (1990-91) and the Teacher Followup Survey (1992) of the National Center for Education Statistics.

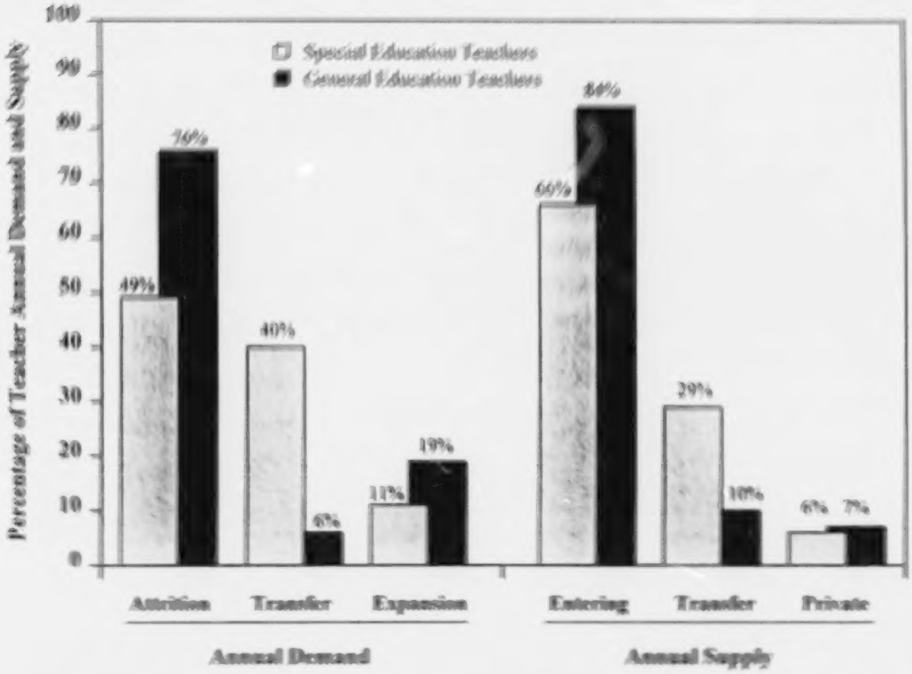

Figure 4. Sources of annual demand for public school teachers (attrition, transfer to other main teacher field, and expansion of teaching positions) as percentages of total annual demand, compared with sources of annual supply of public school teachers (entering teachers, transfer from the other main teaching field, and migration from private schools) as percentages of total annual supply, by main teaching field. Data Source: The Schools and Staffing Survey (1990-91) and the Teacher Followup Survey (1992) of the National Center for Education Statistics.

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Annual Teacher Demand and Supply

As shown in Figure 1, there is considerable annual outflow of SETs and GETs--both in transfer to the other teaching field and in attrition from the profession. Such outflow creates open positions (i.e., demand) that need to be filled with an inflow of teachers (i.e., supply) from various sources. With its relatively high percentage of transfer of teachers to general education, the annual demand for new hires is considerably greater in special education (13%) than in general education (7%). National estimates of the components of annual demand and annual supply for SETs and GETs are presented in Figure 4. In addition to demand for teachers created by attrition and teaching field transfer, another component of demand for SETs and GETs is the annual expansion of the number of teaching positions.[7]

The left half of Figure 4 shows that the factors contributing to annual demand for individuals to fill open teaching positions are quite different in special education than in general education. The major difference is due to the relatively high rate of transfer of SETs to general education in comparison with transfer of GETs to special education. The data suggest that 40% of teaching positions that open annually in special education are created by transfer teachers to general education, while only 6% of the open positions in general education are created by transfers to special education. The cross-field transfer of SETs is such an important source of demand for additional teachers that it rivals attrition as a source of demand (40% for cross-field transfer vs. 49% for attrition), and it tends to minimize the relative importance of the annual growth of teaching positions (11%), even though the growth of SETs from 1984-85 to 1991-92 has outpaced the growth of GETs by a factor of 1.7 (Boe, unpublished data).

Some factors might be responsible for both cross-field transfer and attrition of SETs (e.g., dissatisfaction with aspects of special education teaching positions), while other factors are particular to attrition (e.g., retirement). It is possible that some strategies to promote retention in special education might address the problems of teaching field transfer and attrition simultaneously, while other strategies need to target problems of teaching field transfer and attrition by different means.

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[7] The estimated numbers for the annual expansion component, as presented in Figure 4 and Table 4, were based on the five-year mean expansion of total teaching positions from 1986 to 1991 as reported from NCES's Common Core of Data (CCD) for public school teachers (Snyder & Hoffman, 1994, p. 74), and adjusted appropriately for differences between SASS and CCD procedures for counting teachers. The proportion of SETs and GETs represented in the CCD data for expansion of total teaching positions was estimated from SASS data and based on the proportion total SETs and total GETs of total teachers as reported in Table 1.

The right half of Figure 4 shows that sources of the annual supply of individuals to fill open teaching positions are also quite different for special education than for general education. The major difference is due to the greater importance of the transfer of GETs to special education in comparison with transfer of SETs to general education. The data show that 29% of teaching positions open annually in special education are filled by teachers that transfer in from general education, while only 10% of the open positions in general education are filled by teachers transferring from special education.

Conclusions

Several important conclusions about teacher retention, transfer, attrition, and supply can be drawn from national estimates of components of the teaching forces in special education and in general education. Since the national estimates reported here pertain specifically to the time period 1990-92, extrapolation to the present time should be made with caution--at least until such time that they are confirmed by analyses of more recent national data. With this caveat in mind, the current findings support the following conclusions:

1. The retention of SETs in special education teaching assignments from one year to the next (89%) is significantly less than the retention of GETs in general education teaching assignments (94%).

2. The lower percentage of retained SETs (89%) than GETs (94%) is due primarily to the transfer of SETs to general education (5%) than the reverse transfer of GETs to special education (0.4%), and only secondarily to differential attrition percentages (6% for SETs, 5% for GETs).

3. Since the big difference between the retention of SETs and GETs is due to the much higher teaching field transfer percentage of SETs, interventions designed to improve retention of SETs might most productively focus on causes of this difference instead of on the broader social, demographic, and economic conditions that account for much attrition from the teaching profession.

4. Of SETs and GETs retained in the same teaching field from one year to the next, approximately the same percentage transfer to different public schools, with the substantial majority remaining in the same district (98% for SETs, 97% for GETs). Even when attrition from the profession is taken into account, district retention of SETs (91%) and GETs (92%) is comparable.

5. The retention of SETs and GETs in the same district from one year to the next is not a function of the urbanity of the school location. Thus the magnitude of district retention problems faced by urban districts is no larger than that faced by rural or suburban districts. It is possible that the nature of problems promoting district attrition may vary and therefore require somewhat different interventions to improve retention.

6. Just as the annual transfer of SETs to general education (about 14,600 teachers) is a major source of open positions that need to be filled, the annual transfer of GETs to special education (about 9,300 teachers) is a major source of supply.

7. While the overall annual demand for new hires in special education (about 13% of its teaching force) is much higher than in general education (about 7% of its teaching force), the annual demand for new hires of entering teachers is approximately equal (8% in special education, 7% in general education) when the annual cross-transfer of continuing teachers between special and general education is taken into account.

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APPENDIX A

Data Sources and the Teacher Sample

The Schools and Staffing Survey of 1990-91 (SASS)

The research reported here is based in part on the Public School Teachers Questionnaire and the Public School Questionnaire of the 1990-91 SASS. The design of this survey, a national probability sample, provides for representative estimates of the numbers and attributes of teachers in both public and private sector schools. A complete technical description of this survey is provided by Kaufman and Huang, 1993.

SASS was administered to national probability samples of public- and private-sector teachers, principals, schools, and public-sector school districts during early 1991. It was composed of four basic questionnaires, with minor variations for units in the public and private sectors. The four questionnaires used in the public sector, along with specification of the units sampled and sample sizes (before modest questionnaire nonresponse) are shown in Table 1 of Appendix A. SASS questionnaires were administered by mail, with extensive telephone followup. Consequently, questionnaire response rates were quite high--a weighted response rate of 91.0% for the Public School Teacher Questionnaire and 95.3% for the Public School Questionnaire (Kaufman & Huang, 1993), both sources of data reported here.

SASS was designed so that schools were the primary sampling unit. Once a school was selected for the sample, the principal of that school was selected for the Administrator Questionnaire and an average of four to eight teachers from that school was selected for the Teacher Questionnaire. In the public sector, the Teacher Demand and Shortage Questionnaire was completed for the district in which the school was located. This design, therefore, permits the linking of data from one questionnaire to another. For example, teachers' perceptions of school climate can be compared with corresponding perceptions of the principals of their schools.

The size of the teacher sample in public schools was ______. The sample design permits national estimates for both special and general education teachers at the elementary and secondary levels in the public sector, as well as for many other variables.

The Public School Teacher Questionnaire concentrated on teachers' current teaching status, teaching experience, teacher training and certification, current teaching assignment and load, perceptions and attitudes toward teaching, compensation and incentives, and demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. It provides data suitable for identifying entering and transferring teachers, including transfers among schools, and for tracing these teachers back to their sources of supply.

The Teacher Followup Survey of 1992 (TFS)

The research reported here is based in major part on 1992 TFS which was derived from and linked to the SASS administered in the prior year. The design of this survey likewise provided for representative estimates of the numbers and attributes of teachers in both public and private sector schools. A technical description of this survey is provided by in Whitener, Kaufman, Rohr, Bynum, and King (1994).

TFS was administered in early 1992 (one year after SASS) to samples of teachers that had been included in the 1990-91 SASS sample of teachers during the prior year. The 1992 administration of TFS was composed of two questionnaires, a Questionnaire for Current Teachers who continued in the teaching profession from the prior year, and a Questionnaire for Former Teachers who had left the teaching profession at the end of the prior school year. The Questionnaire for Current Teachers was administered to a national sample of teachers drawn from the prior SASS sample of teachers. One stratum of this sample included teachers who had continued teaching in the same school (stayers), while another stratum included teachers who had moved to a different school (movers). Teacher samples within each stratum were national probability samples. In contrast, the Questionnaire for Former Teachers was administered to all teachers included in the SASS samples who had left the teaching profession at the end of the prior school year (leavers). The sample sizes for the followup questionnaires are also shown in Table 1.

TFS questionnaires were administered by mail, with extensive telephone followup. Consequently, questionnaire response rates were high--a weighted response rate of 97.4% for the Questionnaire for Current Teachers and 92.4 % for the Questionnaire for Former Teachers (Whitener, et al., 1994, p. 11).

The followup questionnaires for teachers concentrated on their current employment and teaching status, educational activities and future plans, a wide variety of opinions about teaching, and demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Since the TFS samples of teachers were drawn from the SASS teacher sample, it is possible to link responses to SASS and TFS questionnaires, thereby permitting analysis of similarities and differences from one year to the next in many variables of interest, such as factors related to teachers transferring among schools and teaching fields, and teachers leaving the profession.

The Teacher Sample

In keeping with the SASS definition of a teacher and for the purposes of this research, a teacher was defined as:

> . . . any full-time or part-time teacher whose primary (i.e., main) assignment was teaching in any of grades K-12. Itinerant teachers were included, as well as long-term substitutes who were filling the role of a regular teacher[a] on an indefinite basis. An itinerant teacher is defined as a teacher who teaches at more than one school (Kaufman & Huang, 1993, p. 11).

Thus, excluded from the definition of a teacher were individuals who identified their main assignment as a pre-kindergarten teacher, short-term substitute, student teacher, non-teaching specialist (e.g., counselor, librarian, school social worker, occupational therapist, and the like), administrator, teacher aide, and other professional or support staff. The selection of a sample of teachers meeting this definition of a teacher was accomplished by a two-stage process. First, schools selected into the SASS school sample were asked to provide teacher lists for their schools from which the teacher sample for the school was then selected. The individuals thus selected were sent the teacher questionnaire, the first item of which asked them to identify their main assignment at that school. Those who indicated that their main assignment was other than a regular, itinerant, or long-term substitute teacher (either full-time or part-time) were not included in the final teacher sample. Thus, at the second stage, teachers self-defined their main assignment and, therefore, their status as a teacher.

SETs were defined for the analyses reported in this paper as public school teachers (K-12) who indicated that their current main teaching assignment was in any one of a variety of teaching specialization in special education provided by the SASS questionnaire, including other special education. Given that the questionnaire included a category for "other special education," then all elementary and secondary teachers with a main assignment in any area of special education should have been able to identify themselves as such, regardless of the particular certification categories or terminology used in their home state.

---

[a] A regular teacher, as used here, includes both SETs and GETs.

GETs were defined here as all public school teachers (K-12) other than SETs.

The sizes of the samples of SETs and GETs on which the analyses of this report were based are presented in Tables 1 through 4 of Appendix B. The total sample sizes given in these tables is the net teacher sample after ineligible schools and teachers were eliminated from the survey, and after modest questionnaire nonresponse.

APPENDIX B

Data Tables

Table 1

Teaching Field Retention, Transfer and Attrition of Public School Teachers from 1990-91 to 1991-92: National Estimates of the Numbers of Special and General Education Teachers

		1990-91: Main Teaching Field*		
Teacher Status: 1991-92	Statistic[a]	Special Education	General Education	Total
Retention in the Same Teaching Field	Nat. Est.	254,961	2,118,476	2,373,437
	Col %	88.7%	94.0%	93.4%
	SE %	1.8%	0.4%	0.4%
	Sample (n)	380	2,761	3,141
Transfer to Other Teaching Field	Nat. Est.	14,559	9,295	23,854
	Col %	5.1%	0.4%	0.9%
	SE %	1.1%	0.1%	0.2%
	Sample (n)	45	32	77
Attrition from Public School Teaching	Nat. Est.	18,043	126,136	144,179
	Col %	6.3%	5.6%	5.7%
	SE %	1.3%	0.4%	0.4%
	Sample (n)	159	1,360	1,519
Total Teaching Force	Nat. Est.	287,563	2,253,907	2,541,470
	SE Est.	16,962	46,984	45,765
	Col %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Sample (n)	584	4,153	4,737

Note. Data from the 1990-91 Schools and Staffing Survey, and the 1992 Teacher Followup Survey, National Center for Education Statistics, USDE.

[a] Nationally weighted estimates (Nat. Est.) of the total numbers of full-time and part-time teachers combined at both the elementary and secondary levels based on the survey sample size (n). Sums of columns or sums of rows may not equal
totals because of rounding. Col % = percentages of nationally estimated teachers of the column total of nationally estimated teachers; SE % = standard error of the column percentages.

*The χ^2 for this 2 x 3 table was significant at 69.02 ($p<.001$).

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Table 2

School Retention, Reassignment, and Migration of Public School Teachers Continuing in Their Main Teaching Field from 1990-91 to 1991-92: National Estimates of the Numbers of Special and General Education Teachers

		1990-91 and 1991-92: Main Teaching Field*		
School Transfer Status: 1991-92	Statistic[a]	Special Education	General Education	Total
Retention in the Same School	Nat. Est.	233,438	1,975,686	2,209,125
	Col %	91.6%	93.3%	93.1%
	SE %	1.3%	0.4%	0.4%
	Sample (n)	244	1,944	2,188
Reassignment to a Different School in the Same District	Nat. Est.	16,222	85,061	101,283
	Col %	6.4%	4.0%	4.3%
	SE %	1.2%	0.3%	0.3%
	Sample (n)	82	411	493
Migration to a Different District in the Same State	Nat. Est.	4,112	43,871	47,983
	Col %	1.6%	2.1%	2.0%
	SE %	0.4%	0.3%	0.2%
	Sample (n)	41	319	360
Migration to a Different District in a Different State	Nat. Est.	1,188	13,858	15,046
	Col %	0.5%	0.7%	0.6%
	SE %	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%
	Sample (n)	_[b]	87	100
Total Teachers Continuing in Same Main Teaching Field	Nat. Est.	254,961	2,118,476	2,373,437
	SE Est.	16,151	46,007	43,917
	Col %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Sample (n)	380	2,761	3,141

Note. Data from the 1990-91 Schools and Staffing Survey, and the 1992 Teacher Followup Survey, National Center for Education Statistics, USDE.

[a] Nationally weighted estimates (Nat. Est.) of the total numbers of full-time and part-time teachers combined at both the elementary and secondary levels based on the survey sample size (n). Sums of columns or sums of rows may not equal totals because of rounding.
Col % = percentages of nationally estimated teachers of the column total of nationally estimated teachers; SE % = standard error of the column percentages.

[b] Sample too small (<30) for computing a reliable estimate.

*The χ^2 for this 2 x 4 table was 6.39 (p>.05).

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Table 3

District Retention and Attrition of Public School Teachers Continuing in Their Main Teaching Field from 1990-91 to 1991-92: National Estimates of the Numbers of Special and General Education Teachers as a Function of Urbanicity of School Location

		Main Teaching Field: 1990-91 and 1991-92*			
		Special Education		General Education	
Urbanicity of School Location: 1990-91	Statistic[a]	District Retention	District Attrition	District Retention	District Attrition
Urban	Nat. Est.	74,703	3,882	525,273	52,912
	Row %	95.1%	4.9%	90.9%	9.1%
	SE %	1.7%	1.7%	0.8%	0.8%
	Sample (n)	94	47	613	377
Suburban/ Large Town	Nat. Est.	59,999	8,717	617,937	53,077
	Row %	87.3%	12.7%	92.1%	7.9%
	SE %	5.1%	5.1%	0.9%	0.9%
	Sample (n)	77	54	633	364
Small Town	Nat. Est.	57,926	5,881	463,230	38,230
	Row %	90.8%	9.2%	92.4%	7.6%
	SE %	1.9%	1.9%	0.9%	0.9%
	Sample (n)	73	54	539	398
Rural	Nat. Est.	42,422	4,175	379,776	34,592
	Row %	91.0%	9.0%	91.7%	8.3%
	SE %	3.0%	3.0%	1.0%	1.0%
	Sample (n)	62	51	485	560
Total Teachers:	Nat. Est.	235,049	22,655	1,986,215	178,811
	SE Est.	16,041	3,772	44,205	11,394
	Row %	91.2%	8.8%	91.7%	8.3%
	Sample (n)	306	206	2,270	1,699

Note. Data from the 1990-91 Schools and Staffing Survey, and the 1992 Teacher Followup Survey, National Center for Education Statistics, USDE.

[a] Nationally weighted estimates (Nat. Est.) of the total numbers of full-time and part-time teachers combined at both the elementary and secondary levels based on the survey sample size (n). Sums of columns or sums of rows may not equal totals because of rounding. Row % = percentages of nationally estimated teachers of the row total of nationally estimated teachers for special and general education separately; SE % = standard error of the row percentages. Nonresponse to the Public School Questionnaire of SASS which provided the urbanicity variable resulted in a sample size reduction of 179 teachers.

*The χ^2 for the 2 x 4 table based on district retention estimates for special and general education and four levels of the urbanicity variable was 4.15 (p>.20).

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Table 4

Sources of Open Teaching Positions (Annual Demand) in Public Schools and Source of Teachers to Fill Open Positions (Annual Supply) in 1991-92: National Estimates of the Numbers of Special and General Education Teachers.

		Main Teaching Field		
Component	Statistic[a]	Special Education	General Education	Total
I. Sources of Annual Demand for Teachers				
A. Attrition from 1990-91	Nat. Est.	18,000	126,100	144,100
	SE Est.	3,670	9,080	12,570
	Col %	49.2%	75.8%	80.5%
	Sample (n)	159	1,360	1,519
B. Transfer to Other Main Teaching Field from 1990-91	Nat. Est.	14,600	9,300	_[b]
	SE Est.	3,270	3,470	
	Col %	39.9%	5.6%	
	Sample (n)	45	32	
C. Expansion of Teaching Positions from 1990-91	Nat. Est.	4,000	31,000	35,000
	Col %	10.9%	18.6%	19.5%
Total Annual Demand	Nat. Est.	36,600	166,400	179,100
	Col %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
II. Sources of Annual Supply of Teachers				
A. Entering Teachers (1990-91 data)	Nat. Est.	21,300	125,300	146,600
	SE Est.			
	Col %	65.5%	83.8%	92.7%
	Sample (n)	388	2,492	2,880
B. Transfer from Other Main Teaching Field from 1990-91	Nat. Est.	9,300	14,600	_[b]
	SE Est.	3,470	3,270	
	Col %	28.6%	9.8%	
	Sample (n)	32	45	
C. Private School Migrants (1990-91 data)	Nat. Est.	1,900	9,700	11,600
	SE Est.	510	2,580	1,630
	Col %	5.8%	6.5%	7.3%
	Sample (n)	27	147	174
Total Annual Supply	Nat. Est.	32,500	149,600	158,200
	Col %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note. Data from the 1987-88 Schools and Staffing Survey and the 1988-89 Teacher Followup Survey, National Center for Education Statistics, USDE.

[a] Nationally weighted estimates (Nat. Est.) of the total numbers of full-time and part-time teachers combined at both the elementary and secondary levels in the public sector. Sums of columns or sums of rows may not equal totals because of rounding. Col = column; SE = standard error; n = sample size.

[b] Transfer of teachers between main teaching fields does not affect the total annual demand for teachers, nor represent a source of supply of total teachers.

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Address: EUGENE RESEARCH INSTITUTE 2 1400C HIGH ST. 3 EUGENE OR 97401 4	Telephone Number: (503) 342-1553
	Date: 10/16/95

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Address: SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY	Telephone Number: (619) 594-4899

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Printed Name: Janet F. Gillmart	Organization:
Address: c/o ERI 2. 1400 High St., Suite C 3 Eugene, OR 97401 4	Telephone Number: ( )
	Date:

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Miller, M.D., Brownell, M.T., & Smith, S.W is the author order

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Attrition of Special Educators: Why They Leave and Where They Go Working Paper

Author(s): Brownell, Mary T. & Others

Corporate Source:

Publication Date: May 95

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Printed Name: Mary T. Brownell	Organization: University of Florida
Address: Department of Special Education G-315 Norman Hall Gainesville, FL 32611	Telephone Number: (904) 392-0701, x 241
	Date: 9/20/95

Paper presented at the National Dissemination Forum on Issues Relating to Special Education Teacher Satisfaction, Retention and Attrition (Washington, DC, May 25-26, 1995)

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I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Retention and Attrition in Special Education: Analysis of Variables that Predict Staying, Transferring, or Leaving. Working Paper

Author(s): Brownell, Mary T. & Others

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Title: The Attrition Picture: Lessons From Three Research Projects. Working Paper #3	
Author(s): Pyecha, John; Levine, Roger	
Corporate Source:	Publication Date: May 95

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Author(s): Gersten, Gillman, Morvant, Billingsley

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1400 High St., Suite C
Eugene, OR 97401

Telephone Number: (   )

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Title: Strategic Planning for Special Education Teacher Retention. Working Paper #8	
Author(s): Campeau, Peggie; Pyecha, John	
Corporate Source:	Publication Date May 95

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	Date: 10/4/95

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I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Teachers' Perceptions of Working Conditions: Section 2: Administrative Support	
Author(s): Russell Gersten, Janet Gillman, Martha Morvant, Bonnie Billingsley	
Corporate Source: Eugene Research Institute Eugene, OR	Publication Date: May 1995

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Signature:	Position: Sr. research associate
Printed Name: Russell Gersten ②	Organization: Eugene Research Institute ①
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I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Retention, Transfer, and Attrition of Special and General Education Teachers in National Perspective

Author(s): Boe, Erling, E., Cook, L. H., Bobbitt, S. A., & Weber, A. L.

Corporate Source: University of Pennsylvania

Publication Date: May 1995

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